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SHASTA, THE GOLD KING; or, FOR SEVEN YEARS DEAD.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

AUTHOR OF "SILVER MASK, THE MAN OF MYSTERY," ETC., ETC., ETC.



THE WILD MAN OF SHASTA TOOK THE GLASS, AND BESTOWED ONE HORRIFIED GLANCE AT THE REFLECTION OF HIS FACE.

Shasta, the Gold King;

OR,
FOR SEVEN YEARS DEAD.

A ROMANCE OF HARDPAN.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,

AUTHOR OF "SILVER-MASK, THE MAN OF MYSTERY," ETC.

THREE ENTREE ACTS.

[CALIFORNIA, 1853.]

The sun was sinking in the west, gilding the tops of the lofty mountains and lining the clouds far above them with a crimson tint, while it cast long shadows of the sturdy pines far across hillside and canyon, and rendered the depths of the latter as black as midnight itself. And in the distance the snow-crowned head of King Shasta could be seen, rearing far above his neighbors like the grand old sentinel that he is.

In a little valley among the hills four men were tramping along, weary and footsore, but keeping steadily on their way, as though they were anxious to lay as many miles behind them as possible while daylight lasted. They were miners, to judge them by their appearance, and upon the back of a mule which they led was packed all their stock in trade, which was evidence conclusive that they had "pulled up stakes," and were either "striking out for home," or going in search of "green fields and pastures new."

Miners they were. And anxious were they, too, to travel as far as possible before they were overtaken by the shades of night.

They were men of '49.

In that great rush to the land of gold they had been among the first to go forth to put to the test the wondrous stories of wealth that was to be had for the picking up, either to confirm the truth or to expose the fallacy of the report, and they were now able to corroborate even the wildest and most exaggerated tale they had ever heard concerning it; even though during the first three years of their sojourn in the "land of sundown," they had repeatedly cursed the day on which they started from home.

For three years they had toiled and delved, but had toiled and delved almost in vain. They had faced hunger and cold, thirst and heat; had dared every danger; and at the end of that time had found themselves but little better off than when they had begun. But at last their luck changed, and the close of their fourth year found them on their way home, each man worth a fortune.

They were James Raesoner and his two sons, Mark and John, and his son-in-law, Ralph Rowland. "Come, dad," enjoined Mark, at length, "hadn't we better strike camp? I for one am about tuckered out."

"Keep up your courage, boy," the old man answered; "keep up your courage. There's a good hour of daylight left, and we must make every minute count. Here it is, nigh onto four years since we have seen the dear faces at home. *Four years!* Think of it—what a while it is! How can you spare a single moment of time, now that our faces are turned toward home and those we love? *I can't; and forward, I say, with a will!*"

"You are right, dad," asserted Mark, as he put new force into his lagging steps, "and you'll not hear another word from me."

"Tis Mary's bright face always before me that keeps up my strength," declared Ralph Rowland. "I see her all the time, with her boy in her arms—the little child that none of us have ever seen, and forward say I, too."

"Forward it is," echoed the others, and they all pushed on with renewed energy.

But scarcely ten minutes later the sharp reports of rifles rung out upon the air, and the homeward-bound miners sunk down in their tracks, bleeding and dying.

Then from a clump of trees a short distance away came forth four men, holding the still smoking weapons in their hands, and over his face each one had a mask of black cloth.

They approached their victims, and were about to rob them of their hard-earned wealth, when Ralph Rowland suddenly raised himself upon his elbow and confronted them with a revolver. One of the murderers fell at once with a bullet in his brain; but before Ralph could fire again the others sprung forward and disarmed him.

"So," cried the leader, "we didn't fetch you at the first round, eh?"

But Ralph Rowland was deaf to the words. He could only moan in anguish as he gazed upon the lifeless forms of his companions.

"Look at me, Ralph Rowland," the leader of the assassins hissed, as he removed the mask from his face. "I am Henry Calley, who was your rival for the hand of pretty Mary Raesoner, five years ago. Do you remember me? I swore then I would kill you if you won her, and kill you I will. Then, with all your wealth in my possession, I will return to Colchester, inform Mary of your death, and in due time I will court and marry her. Will not that be sweet revenge? I—"

But Ralph had struggled to his feet, and was reeling forward to grasp the villain's throat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Calley. "I see it tears your heart to think of it. But time is precious to me just now, so I will put an end to you and be off," and as he spoke he raised his revolver and

fired a shot at the wounded man, dropping him at his feet with the life-blood oozing from his head.

Then the murderer secured all the gold the travelers had possessed and started off, leading the mule, and leaving the dead where they had fallen, food for the mountain wolves.

[OHIO, 1853.]

The noontide sun was beaming down upon the shapely head and handsome face of a young woman, who was seated upon the steps of a neat farmhouse, toying with the golden curls of a little, bright-eyed boy, whom she held in her lap.

"Your papa may be here to-day, my little man," she was heard to say, "and what will he think of his little Ralph, I wonder?"

"Not to-day, Mary—Mrs. Rowland," said a voice, "not to-day."

The woman sprung to her feet, as she looked quickly around, and exclaimed:

"Henry Calley!"

"Yes, it is I."

"And my husband?"

"He did not come home. He is—he is ill. He is very ill. He—"

"Speak!" cried the woman. "Tell me all!"

"Mary, he is dead."

With a piercing scream the woman fell to the ground in a swoon.

"Who is dead?" demanded a gentle-looking old lady, who at that moment appeared at the door.

"Ralph Rowland is dead."

The old lady sunk down upon the steps.

"And my husband—my boys?" she gasped.

"All are dead."

"Oh!" was all the poor woman uttered, placing her hand upon her breast, and with a single gasp her heart had ceased to beat.

Then, for the first time, Henry Calley trembled as he looked upon his work. But only for a moment, and then he nerved himself for the part he was to play.

[OHIO, 1856.]

It was a bright Sabbath morning, and the bells in the little town of Colchester were ringing merrily.

At ten o'clock a wedding-party alighted before a neat, white church, and entered.

"Blessed is a bride on whom the sun doth shine," said the pastor of the church, who was waiting to receive them, and then in a few minutes the ceremony began.

But as the solemn rite progressed an ominous cloud came before the sun, the deep tones of thunder were heard, and the interior of the church was almost darkened.

"And now," added the pastor, as he closed his book at last, "Henry Calley and Mary Rowland, I do pronounce you man and wife."

A vivid flash of lightning, a deafening clap of thunder, and a giant tree right by the door of the church was shattered to its very roots, as though to express the wrath of the Deity.

[CALIFORNIA, 1860.]

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD MAN OF SHASTA.

WITHIN the shadow of the great Mount Shasta's peak, two hunters, William Tappan and Thomas Pratt, purveyors to the town of Hardpan, were walking leisurely along late one afternoon, with their rifles upon their shoulders, when suddenly they came to a halt and grasped their weapons, as a wild, unearthly scream, echoed and re-echoed among the hills.

"What wur that, Bill?" asked Pratt of his companion.

"Hang me if I know, Tom," replied the other, "unless it's th' Wild Man of Shasta."

"Th' Wild Man of Shasta!" exclaimed the first speaker, "who's he?"

"That's more'n I kin tell ye, pard, but he's a critter that's been a-cavortin' round among these heur hills fer th' past five or six years, makin' himself a mystery to th' hunters an' a terror to th' Injuns. I've seen him several times, an' I've made up my mind to capture him th' next time I run across him, providin' it kin be did."

Hardly were the words spoken when another ear-splitting yell was heard, and a strange, wild-looking being appeared at a short distance away.

Without another word the hunter raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired, and the being fell forward upon his face in a clump of bushes.

"Have ye killed him, Bill?" asked Pratt, eagerly.

"Nary kill," Bill answered laconically. "I only grazed his head with th' bullet, to knock him over. He'll soon be all right ag'in."

A moment later the two hunters were standing over the prostrate form of the Wild Man of Shasta, who for a number of years had roamed at will among the mountains, and had frequently been seen by the hunters and the Indians.

His head and face were covered with long hair and beard, and his body was partly clothed in the skins of wild animals. His nails were long, and his teeth, as they could be seen between his parted lips, were as white as those of any carnivorous beast. He was large and well-proportioned, and his muscular arms and legs spoke mutely of his herculean strength.

"You tie his feet, Tom, while I do th' same for his hands," ordered Tom, as he produced a stout thong and began to secure the wild man's wrists together.

But hardly was this done when the wild being opened his eyes and gazed at the two hunters.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a low and pleasant tone.

Tom looked at Bill, and Bill looked at Tom, in surprise.

"He don't seem to talk much crazy," said Bill.

"No," responded Tom—"that's so. I guess you've knocked some sense into him."

"Where am I?" the wild man asked again.

"Whar be you?" repeated Bill. "Why, you're right heur—right under th' protectin' wing of old King Shasta."

"And where are they?"

"Which—the wings?"

"No; I mean my friends."

"Good Lord! you don't mean to say thar's more of yer like about, do ye?" exclaimed Bill, as he clutched his rifle and glanced furtively around.

"There were four of us," declared the wild man, reflectively.

"Great Joshua!" ejaculated Tom. "Four!"

"But—oh, God!" and the wild man passed his hand across his forehead—"I remember; we were all shot!"

"I guess what little sense you did knock into him, Bill, is a-slippin' out ag'in," Tom suggested.

"It looks like it, fer sure."

Suddenly the wild man discovered that his hands and feet were bound, and he turned toward the two hunters in a rage.

"Why am I thus bound?" he demanded. "Did you two take part in that cowardly massacre?"

"Wal," returned Bill, "I don't know jest what you're a-gettin' at, pard, but as to our takin' part in any massacre, I kin asseverate that we *didn't*. What massacre do ye mean? Who's been kilt?"

"My friends and I were fired upon not ten minutes ago," announced the wild man, "and they were killed."

"Somethin' wantin'," concluded Tom Pratt, tapping his forehead significantly.

The wild man saw and heard him.

"Do you think I am out of my mind?" he asked.

"It looks like it, sart'in."

"Are you my friends?"

"Th' ones what was shot? No, we ain't 'em."

"I mean will you be my friends?"

"Yes," assured Bill, "we'll be yer friends, fer ye look as though ye need some, mighty bad."

"Then take off these cords and let me stand up."

"Sure ye won't run off?"

"Of course I won't. Why should I?"

The hunters cut the thongs that held him, and the wild man stood up.

"Where's my belt?" he asked, as he placed his hand to his side, and as he spoke he glanced down and beheld his strange attire.

"God in Heaven!" he cried, "what is this? Who am I—where am I—what am I?"

"Wal, pard," answered Bill Tappan, as he leaned upon his rifle, "fer a number of years back, men have called ye th' Wild Man of Shasta."

"For a number of years—The Wild Man of Shasta—What do you mean?"

"That's jest it, pard, fer a solid fact."

For half a minute or more Tom Pratt had been searching his pockets, and at last he brought to light a small looking-glass.

"Mebby ye'd like to take a squint at yer phiz," and he extended the glass.

The Wild Man of Shasta took the glass and, bestowing one horrified glance at the reflection of his face, sunk down upon the trunk of a fallen tree, as if overcome with a terrible discovery.

"For God's sake, men," he gasped, "tell me what year this is?"

"This are th' year of our Lord, eighteen hundred an' sixty."

"Eighteen-sixty!" the man cried, springing to his feet again, with his hands clasped to his head.

"Pard," earnestly spoke Bill, "let's git at this heur thing right. Tell us who ye be, an' whar ye'r' from, an' then we'll see what we kin do fer ye."

"First tell me how, when, and where you found me," the stranger demanded.

"Wal, as I said, you're th' Wild Man of Shasta. I've seen ye several times within th' past three or four years, an' when ye kem along to-day I thought I'd knock ye over an' see what sort of a bein' ye wur. But it seems th' shock has brung ye back to yer senses."

"It must be so," the man asserted—"it must be so. And now I will tell you something of myself."

"More than ten years ago, if this be the year you say it is, myself and four others started from our homes to dig for fortunes in the gold-fields of California. We had hard luck for the first three years, but the fourth year brought us gold in abundance. One of our party, however, had deserted us the first year we were out, and so he did not share our good fortune. His name was— But that does not matter."

"The close of our fourth year found us on our way out of the diggings, and we were tramping peacefully along one afternoon, when, without a moment's warning, we were shot down in our tracks."

"An' that is all ye kin recollect?" asked Bill.

"Yes, that is all. And yet, something like a dream of the past haunts my brain. I think I can see the lightning flashing, and hear the thunder rolling. I see my companions lying dead around me, and hungry wolves are gnawing at their flesh. I try to scream, but seem unable to do so. The wolves spring at me, and I fight them off and run. On, on, I fly, screaming now in horror as I go, and they are ever at my heels. Then I stand and fight them with a club, and it seems that some one is lying at my feet, but I can't tell who. Ugh! it is horrible to think of!"

"Then, yer head is all level ag'in, is it?"

"Yes," replied the man, "all is now clear. I have been thinking of Mary, my wife, night and day, and I must hurry to her side. I wrote her to expect me home on a certain day, and she will look for me. I—"

"Ye fergit that it is seven years since then, according to your story," suggested Bill.

"Seven years! Have I then been dead for seven years? Oh, my God, my God! Oh, Mary, my wife, where are you?" And the poor man laid his face upon his hands and wept.

"Cheer up, pard!" encouraged Bill Tappan, as he dashed the tears away from his own eyes. "Tom an' me 'll take ye down to Hardpan an' fix ye out with some duds, an' give ye a start fer home."

By his leave the two hunters whetted their knives and cut some of the hair away from the madman's head and face, and then carefully bandaged the slight wound that Bill's well-directed bullet had made.

"Where is Hardpan?" the man asked as this was being done.

"It's about a dozen miles or so to the north of us," replied Bill. "It's a minin'-town, an' Tom an' me help supply th' place with fresh meat."

"May I ask your names?"

"Sart'in. Mine is Bill Tappan, an' his is Tom Pratt. We're both from old Kentuck. I've been in these heur parts fer a dozen years, but Tom kem up only a few months ago."

"You mentioned giving me a start toward home. Will you do it?"

"Sart'in sure!"

"If you do you shall not lose by it. In the year of 'fifty-three my friends and I had one of the best-paying claims in this country, and if I can find it again half of it shall be yours. All I ask is cash enough to carry me to Ohio."

"An' that's jest what we'll give ye, pard, although we don't want nothin' in return."

"Well," added the unfortunate man, "even though I am never able to repay your kindness to me this day, in me you shall always have a true friend."

"What did ye say yer handle wur?" asked Bill, when at length they had started toward the town of Hardpan.

"My name is Ralph Rowland," was the reply. "But," he added, as though communing with himself, "to the world I am dead, and perhaps I had better continue so until I find whether it is for the best or not."

"You say men called me the Wild Man of Shasta?" addressing Bill Tappan. "Well, I will now call myself *Shasta Wildman*! How will that do for a name?"

"Good's any," replied Bill, with his usual brevity.

Night came on before the three reached Hardpan, and Ralph was conducted to the cabin of the two hunters without being observed by any one. Poor Ralph Rowland!

CHAPTER II.

A DISCOVERY.

"Now, stranger," remarked Bill Tappan, when the three were within the cabin, "heur we be, an' we expect ye to make yerself right to home."

Tom hung the bearskin curtain of the cabin window up in place, and then he and Bill began to overhaul their wardrobe.

"Ye see, pard Wildman, if that's th' handle ye mean to sail under, we'll jest fix ye out sort o' temporary-like, an' then ye kin go down to Goose's—that's th' storekeeper's name—an' dress yerself right up in style. Now, heur are a pair of old gun-boats of mine," hauling out a pair of old boots, "an' heur are a shirt. Heur's a pair of breeches, an' heur's a old hat of Tom's. I guess ye kin git into 'em, an' if ye kin—wal, that's all that's required."

Shasta Wildman divested himself of the skins he wore, and donned the ill-fitting articles of clothing which the hunters provided for him.

"Thar, pard," said Bill, "that's better. Th' fit of th' duds don't add much to yer personal beauty an' appearance, I'll sw'ar; but ye look more like a citizen fer all that."

"They are better than no clothes at all," answered Shasta, "and I am thankful to receive them."

"That's all right, pard; say no more about it."

Tom Pratt started a fire in their little camp stove, and soon had a boiling pot of coffee ready for use; after which he produced some meat and crackers, and placed them upon the rude table, and then asked his companions to "step up to th' rack an' git th' rations."

When they had finished their meal, Bill brought out a small bag of money and laid it upon the table before his guest.

"Thar's some ducats fer ye, pard," he said—"bout a thousan' dollars. When I take a notion to do a thing, I generally do it right up in shape. Take th' money, pard, an' we'll go down to Goose's an' see if he kin rig ye out, an' then ye kin jest stow th' rest of it away fer future use. Thar, now, shet yer head right up, fer I don't want no *ifs* an' *ands* about it! Th' money's yourn, an' that settles it. If ye ever want to pay it back, all right; an' if ye don't, *ditter*; which means th' same."

"Thanks, my friends," said Shasta, his voice trembling with suppressed emotion as he spoke, "this kindness shall never be forgotten."

Leaving the cabin the three turned their steps toward the center of the town.

Hardpan was a blooming town, as its citizens were wont to declare, and at that hour in the evening everything was in full bloom. The Primrose, as the principal saloon of the town was called, was going at full blast, and the scraping of a fiddle and shuffling of feet were heard as the three friends passed the door.

On arriving at the store, they entered, and Bill Tappan introduced his new "pard" to the proprietor.

"He's a pertic'lar friend of mine, Mr. Goose," he said, "an' I want ye to do th' real white thing by him. Don't go fer to take him fer a pilgrim, fer he ain't. He's a citizen. He's a real, old-time, bed-rock man of th' year 'forty-nine, an' don't ye fergit it. He's a gentleman, he is, Mr. Goose, an' I back him up."

"What kin I do fer ye?" asked Mr. Goose, of Shasta.

"If you can you may fit me out with a full suit of clothes, hat and boots included," Shasta answered.

"Which I kin do," said Mr. Goose, and he began at once to exhibit his stock.

Of course it was impossible for a man to dress himself very elegantly in such an establishment, but the clothes that Shasta Wildman bought there had the one good quality of fitting him, which was a decided advantage over those that the two hunters had provided him with, and when at last his purchases in that line were made, he looked like a new man.

"Now," said he, "if I had my belt and revolvers, I would feel like my old self again."

"My friend," said Mr. Goose, "if you want to buy a pair of revolvers and a belt, I will sell you as good a pair as there is in this town, exceptin' Red Jim's, an' them of his can't be beat nowhere."

"Let me see them," Shasta said.

They were quickly forthcoming, Mr. Goose evidently scenting a good trade, knowing that his customer was well supplied with money.

Shasta examined the arms, and then asked the price, which was fifty dollars.

"Whew! Ginger!" exclaimed Bill Tappan and Tom Pratt in the same breath.

"See heur, ye cock-eyed old buzzard-bait, what d'ye mean?" cried Bill. "Didn't I tell ye to come right down to pr me figgers? Why, fifty dollars is 'most enough to buy Red Jim's shootin'-irons! Now, jest name yer lowest price fer them ar' pop-guns, quicker'n soon!"

"Well," said Mr. Goose, "seein' as he's a friend of yourn, pard, I'll let 'em go fer twenty dollars."

Shasta bought them at that price, and put on the belt.

"Ye see," said Bill, as they went out, "things hev tuck a change out heur sence seven years ago, an' ye've got to keep yer eye wide open all th' time, specially heur in Hardpan. There's th' durnedest set of rascals round heur thet ye ever heerd tell on. There is, by gum!"

There was a barber's shop in Hardpan, and seeing the sign as he came from the store, Shasta went directly to it, and half an hour under the skillful hands of the knight of the comb and shears still further improved his appearance.

"And now," he said, when they were once more upon the street, "my friends, will you please inform me when and how I can make the earliest start for the East?"

"Day after to-morrer, pard, is th' soonest start ye kin git," said Bill. "Th' stage-coach only makes one trip a week up heur. She comes in to-morrer night, and starts back next mornin'."

"Must I wait here in idleness for a whole day?" Shasta mused. "How can I wait? Poor Mary! she must mourn me as dead."

"One day can't make much difference, after a matter of seven years," said Bill, "so ye'd jest better content yerself. Heur's th' Primrose, pard, let's go in fer an hour or so an' enjoy ourselves."

They entered the saloon.

The place was well filled, and dancing and card-playing seemed to be the order of the evening, while at the bar many of the rough-looking denizens of Hardpan were imbibing freely of the fiery liquid that inebriates, pouring it into their capacious stomachs like so much water.

"Will ye take a little of th' critter, pard?" asked Bill, jerking his thumb toward the bar.

"No," replied Shasta, "I never drink. And though I did, I would be afraid to drink now, for even the coffee that I drank only a short time ago is playing the very deuce with my brain. The Lord only knows what I subsisted on during my mad spell, but in the way of drink it was evidently nothing stronger than water."

"That bein' th' case, pard, we won't urge ye. But of course you'll 'skuse Tom an' me if we step up an' take our customary, won't ye?"

"Most certainly," answered Shasta. "Don't stand upon ceremony on my account, but go ahead."

The two hunters stepped up to the bar and called for drinks, and Shasta seated himself at a table that chanced to be vacant. But hardly had he done so when a firm hand grasped his shoulder, and a voice exclaimed:

"So, ye don't drink no firewater, eh? Wal, that jest beats all tarnation!"

Shasta looked quickly around, and found that he was in the hands of a big, red-bearded giant, who held a cocked revolver in alarming proximity to his head.

"But ye *do* drink, pilgrim. I *know* ye do," this modern giant continued. "It's only 'cause th' right man didn't ax ye, that ye said no. Now, amble right up thar an' lift yer p'izen, er else thar'll be a funeral in this heur burg, an' you'll figger as th' corpus!"

"Great Joshua!" exclaimed Tom Pratt, as he glanced around to see what was going on, "heur's a young circus, Bill, an' our pard Shasta is in th' ring, with Red Jim a-playin' ringmaster!"

The two hunters drew their revolvers in an instant, but the red-bearded giant was too quick for them, and before they could bring their weapons to bear upon him, he had them "covered."

"Hol' on, thar," he cried, "I kin 'tend to this heur affair without any of *your* help; so jest put up yer pops!"

As for Shasta Wildman, not the least sign of fear did he exhibit, but sat and stared at the red giant's revolvers with an expression of great surprise upon his face.

The revolvers were both alike and were evidently of European make. The handles were of silver, carved to represent the head of a tiger, in the mouth of which was held a ring of gold. They were large weapons, and, once seen, were not likely to be forgotten.

Red Jim was the bully of Hardpan. He was as strong as a bull, quite reckless with his revolvers, and he generally "ran" the town to suit his own fancy.

"Wal, will ye drink?" he shouted.

But Shasta did not heed the question.

"Tell me," he eagerly demanded, "how came those weapons in your possession?"

"What the deuce is that to you? Is it any of your business whar I got 'em?" the bully answered in great bluster, although at the instant the question was asked his face had paled.

"They are mine," said Shasta, quietly.

"Yourn! Ha, ha, ha! Wal, ef that don't jest beat all! Ha, ha, ha! Yourn! Why, ye thunderin' pilgrim, I hev carried these heur tools fer *years*!"

"Yes," said Shasta, "about seven years."

The face of the bully turned deadly pale and his hand trembled, yet he tried to appear calm.

"It don't make no difference," he shouted, "whether it's seven years or seventeen years; you've got to drink!"

Every eye in the saloon was on them now, but the red-bearded giant's revolvers held the whole crowd at bay, he having his back against the wall.

"Shall I tell you how, when and where those arms came into your hands?" Shasta asked.

Red Jim's eyes flashed in rage.

"Drink, or die!" he cried.

Shasta saw that the man was desperate and meant "shoot," so calling for the liquor he poured out a glassful and raised it to his lips.

But he had no intention of drinking.

At the moment when all expected to see him drain the glass he sprung up and grasped the giant, raised him in his arms, and with a most wonderful display of strength threw him through a window, carrying away glass, sash and all.

It was a surprise to everybody.

Shasta's action had thrown the bully partly off his guard, and he had taken advantage of the moment.

But to throw him out of the window was something that he had not thought of doing, and when he realized that he had done so he was surprised at his own strength. Never before had he thought himself able to do such a thing.

"Hurrah!" shouted Bill Tappan. "That's th' way to do it, pard! I guess Red Jim won't want to tackle *you* ag'in in a hurry!"

Shasta picked up the revolvers which Red Jim had dropped, thrust them into his belt, and then hurried out with the others to see what had become of Hardpan's fallen "chief."

Loud groans were heard issuing from beneath the window, and those who approached the spot were horrified to find Red Jim impaled upon a sharp stake that stood about two feet above the ground. He had fallen with his back upon it, and the sharp point was protruding through his breast.

"My God!" cried Shasta, when he beheld the sickening sight, "this is dreadful! Is there a doctor in the town, or any one who can help this poor fellow?"

"Th' postmaster is a sort of medicine-man," said some one in the crowd, "an' I'll fetch him, right off."

In a few minutes the postmaster came, and he at once pronounced it a fatal wound.

"He may live half an hour if you leave him right ther," he said, "but if you pull out the stick he'll die in five minutes."

"His's too bad, too bad," said Shasta. "I wish it had not happened."

"He's only been around here a few weeks, but he's made himself a terror during that time, and I guess nobody will mourn his loss very much," said the postmaster, and he walked away again.

The poor wretch's cries and groans were awful to hear.

"Fer God's sake help me, somebody," he cried. "Git this stick out of my back."

Shasta took a knife that was in the man's belt and succeeded in cutting the stake off close to the ground, thus enabling Red Jim to lie upon his side.

"God ble's ye fer that, stranger," said Jim. "I'm sorry I tried fer to bul'y ye, an' I know that I deserve what I've got fer it. I fergive ye, pard, an' I hope you'll call it squar'."

"I am sorry for you, my poor fellow," said Shasta. "I had no intention of killing you. This was more an accident than anything else."

"I know it, pard, an' I don't blame ye fer it. But I'm a dyin' an' I wish I could straddle over th' big divide with a clear an' clean record, but I can't. I've got some awful 'ol ck accounts to settle when I git up thar to th' Captain's office, an' I'm 'fraid I won't pass."

"Have you any objections to telling me what you know concerning these weapons?" asked Shasta, showing the man the two revolvers.

"No," answered the dying man, "I'll tell th' hull thing. It wur th' blackest piece of work I ever had a hand in. 'Bout seven years ago, near's I kin tell, I fell in with a chap who called himself Captain Frisco. He had another name, but I can't remember what it was—"

"Hold on, my man," exclaimed Shasta, "this

Shasta, the Gold King.

must be reduced to writing. Will somebody please bring paper and pen as quickly as possible?"

Bill Tappan hurried away to the store, and in a few minutes returned with paper, pen, and ink.

During his absence Red Jim had been carried into the saloon.

"Now, my poor fellow," said Shasta, spreading the paper out upon a table, "go ahead. I guess I can pen the words almost as fast as you are able to utter them."

"Wal," said Red Jim, "speaking with great difficulty, 'I fell in with this Captain Frisco, as I said, an' he were doin' a little road agent business. One day he told us boys—there were three of us—that he had a big job on hand, an' promised us a pile of money if we'd help him carry it out. He said there were four men a-comin' down from th' hills, with lots of gold, an' we could git ahead of 'em an' capture it all. We 'greed to help him, an' so he led us to th' place where we war to waylay th' miners as they kem by. Late in th' afternoon th' four men kem along, an' we shot 'em down. Then we all rushed out fer th' gold. But there was one of 'em that wasn't dead, an' he riz up an' plugged one of my pards an' killed him. An' he done it with one of them 'ar same pops. But we soon disarmed him, an' then after sayin' a few words to him 'bout some gal, Frisco shot him ag'in. Then we went off to camp, got b'illin' drunk, an' while we wur asleep Frisco lit out with all th' plunder."

The man was growing so weak by this time that he could hardly speak.

"What is your real name?" asked Shaster.

"My name is James Week. I'm from Virginia."

"And what is the name of the other living man who figured in that murder?"

"I can't tell ye that, pard," Red Jim answered. "He's been a true pard to me, an' I won't go back on him."

Shasta hurriedly copied off the notes he had jotted down, arranging them in better form as a dying confession, and then after reading it aloud he asked the dying outlaw to sign the paper.

Red Jim took the pen and scrawled his name upon the page, after which Bill Tappan, Tom Pratt, and one or two others, signed it as witnesses.

"An' now, pard," said Jim, as Shasta put the paper carefully away, "who be you?"

"I am the owner of these revolvers," Shasta answered. "I am the man who shot your companion in crime that day, and he whom you left for dead, food for the wolves."

"Then, thank God, I ain't a murderer quite, for you're th' man that I shot at from th' trees. Ye see we each took one of ye, jest accordin' to th' way we stood, an' you fell to me. Of course I shot to kill ye, I don't deny that, but thank God I didn't."

"And you can't remember Captain Frisco's real name?"

"No, I can't tell it now."

"Was it—" and Shasta placed his lips to Red Jim's ear, "was it *Henry Calley*?"

"Yes, yes! That's it! I remember it now."

The man's words were scarcely audible, and as he ceased speaking a dark stream of blood sprang from his mouth. For a few moments he struggled, a few groans were heard, and then Red Jim was no more.

"Poor fellow," said Shasta, "he deserved the fate, but I would have saved him if I could. He was but a tool in the hand of another. Will some of you give him a decent burial? I will pay for the work."

Willing hands were soon found to undertake the task, and half an hour later the outlaw was in his last resting-place.

CHAPTER III.

GREATER DISCOVERIES.

SHASTA WILDMAN and the two hunters returned to the cabin, where they talked over the events of the evening.

"Things is jest a-boomin', ain't they, pard?" said Bill Tappan.

"Yes," answered Shasta, "and I shall not be surprised at anything else that may occur. The events of this day, so far as I am concerned, at least, are truly wonderful." And at length he added:

"Having to wait here till day after to-morrow before I can start for home, I will go to-morrow in search of the gold mine that I spoke to you about. I may be able to find it, unless the place is so changed that I will not know it."

"What sort of a place wur it?" asked Bill.

"It was situated near three hills, which were called the three sisters, and—"

"Why, pard," Bill exclaimed, "I know whar that place is, an' there's one of th' biggest mines there thet there is in all Cal'forny. I guess yer find has been gobbled up by somebody else."

"What! is there a mine being worked there now?"

"That there is, pard, an' no mistake. It is called th' Pearl, an' it's the richest mine I ever heerd tell of."

"Who owns it?"

"Wal, as fer that," said Bill, "I can't tell ye his name, but he's a reg'lar nabob. I've seen him. He comes up to Hardpan once in a while, an' then goes over to th' Pearl on horseback. It's only 'bout ten miles or so from here to th' mine. There's gettin' to be quite a town over thar, too, an' thar's a big hotel thar that th' owner of th' Pearl put up. But th' stage-coach don't run thar yit, an' there's no post-office, though I hear thar's goin' to be one opened in a week or two."

"Can you go over there with me to-morrow?" asked Shasta.

"Wal, pard, we had sich poor luck a-huntin', yesterday, that we can't very well lose to-morrow. But

we'll put ye on th' trail, an' ye kin find th' place easy enough."

"All right. I don't want to keep you from your work," Shasta replied. "I'm deeply indebted to you already."

Early the next morning he started out on foot to visit the Pearl mine, and arrived at his destination in due time.

He found that the mills of the mine were standing upon the same spot where, seven years before, had stood the cabin occupied by himself and the Raesoners. The buildings were large, and the town itself had every appearance of proving a success. In fact, it seemed to have a fair chance to surpass Hardpan in a short time. The hotel was large and commodious, and was in every respect a first-class building.

Shasta walked around the town for some time, viewing the scenes that were once so familiar to him, but now so changed, although it seemed but yesterday when he saw them last, and at last he approached the office of the Pearl and entered.

A clerk asked his business, and he said:

"I came here to learn who is the owner of this mine."

"It is owned by the Pearl Mining Company," the clerk replied.

"And who is at the head of the company?"

"Mr. Henry Calley, of San Francisco. He is the president, and the mine is working under his management."

Shasta left the office and started at once on the back trail to Hardpan, musing to himself as he walked along:

"So," he muttered, "Henry Calley is enjoying the fruits of his crime, while I am a beggar."

"Can it be true that for seven long years I have been a madman, running wild among these hills and canyons? Can it be true—or am I dreaming?"

"Seven years away from my wife and the little child whom I have never seen! Poor Mary! At thought of her my heart seems bursting in my breast. How she must have waited and watched for my coming through all those weary years, waited and watched only in vain."

"But, God in heaven! *has* she waited? May she not at this very moment be the wife of another? No, no, no! It must not—*can* not be so! The very thought drives me mad!" and pressing his hands to his head the poor man sobbed aloud in his agony of mind.

"Will to-morrow never come?" he cried. "How can I remain here another hour! Mary, Mary, poor heart, wait and watch but a few weeks longer, and then I shall be with you."

"What a sad, sad home that must be, to those who are watching for their loved ones to return. Poor Mrs. Raesoner! How she must be hoping, though almost in despair, that her husband and her boys will yet return. And must I bear the awful truth to her? The shock will kill her."

"Ah! Henry Calley, I am upon your track, and I will bring you to account for your crimes. Enjoy your wealth while you may, for in the presence of Almighty God I swear that I will hunt you down and wring every drop of blood from your accursed heart! I will cause you to suffer all that is possible for man to suffer. The seven years that are blotted out of my life shall be doubled when I repay them to you. Make the most of your time and wealth, for *the end is coming*."

So occupied was Shasta with his thoughts that he failed to see a man who had stepped out into the road in front of him, until he was almost upon him, and then he stopped in an instant and clutched his revolver.

Before him stood an Indian.

He was a noble-looking fellow, as straight as an arrow, and apparently not more than thirty years of age.

"Does the mad wolf-killer not know his friend?" he asked, speaking in tolerably good English.

"I must confess that I fail to catch your meaning," Shasta said, in reply.

"The mad wolf-killer ran away from his red brother yesterday," said the Indian, "and Eagle-Eye has been looking for him. But he finds him no longer mad. He finds him dressed like the pale-face people, and not in the skins that he wore yesterday. And his eyes are no longer wild."

"Do you call *me* the mad wolf-killer?" Shasta asked.

"Yes," the Indian replied. "Do you not know me—Eagle-Eye?"

"Never saw you before in my life that I am aware of," Shasta answered.

"Eagle-Eye will take his white brother's mind back to the past, and tell him where he has seen Eagle-Eye."

"One black, stormy night, Eagle-Eye fell from a high cliff, and was hurt so badly that he could not walk. The mountain wolves found him lying in the valley, and were about to eat his flesh, when the mad wolf-killer came, screaming loudly, and knocked them right and left with a club."

"All night long he stood there with his back against a large boulder, Eagle-Eye lying at his feet, and fought away the hungry wolves with his club, and when morning came he fell upon the ground like one dead."

"Then Eagle-Eye crawled away to a stream and brought water and bathed his face, and when he came back from the spirit-land, and opened his eyes, Eagle-Eye assisted him to the top of the big rock."

"That day, and all through the following night, they lay there, with the wolves crying around the rock, but unable to reach them."

"When morning came Eagle-Eye was better, and he led the mad wolf-killer away to a cave in the hills, where he has lived with him for a long time."

"Eagle-Eye," said Shasta, extending his hand, "your words take my mind back to that time. I remember you, and I thank you for all you have done for me."

"Does the wolf-killer remember the cave where he lived, and the gold that is stored there?" the Indian asked.

"No," said Shasta, "I do not remember it."

"Will you come with Eagle-Eye to the place?"

The forenoon was not gone, and not knowing how to pass away the time till night, Shasta consented to go with his strange friend, feeling, as he did, a true friendship for him, and a decided interest in his story.

A tramp of three hours brought them to the spot, and they halted at a cave in the side of a steep hill.

They entered the cave, and at that moment Shasta seemed to awaken as from a dream, the past coming back to him like the events of yesterday come to us on waking from a night's sleep. He remembered the cave, and the long days and nights that he had passed there with his Indian friend.

Going to the furthest end of the cave he pulled away a small slab of stone from before a niche in the wall, and there was revealed an immense treasure of gold. There were nuggets as large as eggs, handfuls of smaller ones, and a quantity of dust that would have made rich the entire town of Hardpan.

Shasta Wildman was a millionaire.

Turning to his companion, he said:

"Eagle Eye, can you lead me to the place where we found this gold?"

The Indian nodded his head and started from the cave. Shasta followed him, and in a few minutes they came to a spot where there was a rich outcrop of the precious metal.

"Here," said the Indian, "has the mad wolf-killer toiled many and many a day, digging the gold from the ground with a sharp stone, while Eagle-Eye carried it down to the valley stream and washed it clean, and then stored it away in the cave."

Shasta remembered the place and the work, but there were many blanks in the past that he could not call to his mind. They were evidently his worst spells of madness, for the Indian said at the sound of the dusky wolf he would drop his work and run away to the woods, screaming, and in some cases would be absent for several days at a time before he—the Indian—could find him and bring him back.

Can it be wondered at that Shasta fell upon his knees then and there and thanked God that his life had been spared, when he realized all that he had passed through? And then grasping the Indian's hand, he said:

"Eagle-Eye, you have no doubt saved my life many times, and I am afraid I can never repay the debt I owe you."

"If Eagle-Eye has saved his brother's life it is no more than the mad wolf-killer has done for him. Eagle-Eye can never forget that terrible night, and as long as he lives he will be his white brother's slave."

"I must go away from here for some time, Eagle-Eye," said Shasta, "and I wish you would stay and guard this treasure until I return."

"Eagle-Eye will stay."

They returned to the cave, where Shasta filled his pockets with some of the nuggets, and then he started upon his return to Hardpan, the Indian guiding him.

When they came near their destination the Indian stopped and said he would go back, and Shasta, presenting him with the revolvers he had bought at Hardpan, bade him farewell and went on alone.

It was after dark when he reached the town, and he went at once to the cabin of his two friends, where he found them at their evening meal.

"Hallo, pard!" exclaimed Bill, "we began fer to think ye'd got lost!"

"No," said Shasta, "I am here all safe and sound, but as hungry as a bear."

"Wal, set right up to th' festive board an' fill in, an' then we'll go down an' see th' stage-coach come to town."

Shasta did not wait for a second call, but sat down at once and partook heartily of the meal with the two hunters, and then, while Tom was clearing the board, he said to Bill:

"I am in luck to-day, my friend, and I am able to repay your loan even before I have used it."

And he threw a handful of nuggets down upon the table.

"Pilgrim fathers!" cried Bill. "Why, pard, heur's five times as much gold as I let ye have. Whew! Great guns! Did ye put th' Pearl mine into yer pocket an' fetch it with ye?"

Shasta laughed.

"No," he answered, "but I have found a new one of my own. I am in luck, boys, and as soon as I return from the East I'll let you come in for a share."

"But," said Bill, "I don't want to take all of this heur gold, pard!"

"You can take it or not, just as you please," said Shasta, "but I shall let it lie right there, so you'd better pick it up and put it away."

Bill protested, but it was of no use, so at last he took the nuggets up and put them away.

Then the three started down toward the Primrose saloon, to be on hand for the arrival of the stage-coach.

CHAPTER IV.

SHASTA MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

SHASTA WILDMAN and the two hunters proceeded direct to the Primrose saloon, which was situated near the center of the town, and which was usually the first stopping-place for the stage-coach upon its arrival.

Shasta, the Gold King.

There the entire town was congregated. Shasta attracted the general attention as he entered the room. All eyes were turned upon him, and perfect silence prevailed. His trouble with Red Jim, and the bully's tragic end, had been talked about by everybody, and in the telling and retelling it had lost nothing of the truth, although every time it had changed lips it had gained wonderfully, until the facts themselves formed the least important part of the report.

The two hunters stepped to the bar, and Shasta stood near them while they took their evening potion, there being no place for him to sit down.

As he stood there a heavy hand fell suddenly upon his shoulder, and a voice hissed into his ear:

"Be you th' galoot what killed Red Jim?"

"I was the cause of his death, I believe," Shasta answered, coolly, as he turned round.

"Then by jumpin' you've got another job on hand! Red Jim wur my pard, he wur, an' th' galoot that sent him home has got to fight me! Come right out heur in th' street, you great big cuss, an' see me drill ye full of holes!"

The speaker was a large, heavily-bearded man, a perfect picture of the Western desperado. He held a cocked revolver in his hand, with the muzzle against Shasta's head.

"Wal, by th' Lord Harry!" cried Bill Tappan, "if our pard ain't got picked up ag'in! Look a-heur, you hairy chief, jest stick that 'ar gun back into yer belt, er else I'll plug ye!" And Bill stuck a revolver under the ear of Red Jim's pard. "Now don't even ez much as wink yer eye, er else I'll slap th' cold lead right into ye, quicker!"

"Oh!" exclaimed this new bully, "you can't skeer me that way! I've got th' dead drop onto your pard, an' ye dar'n't pull a trigger onto me, fer if ye do I kin pull th' same instant, an' away goes yer pard to glory. Don't ye fergit to remember it. My name is Texas Joe, it are, an' I kin climb up any man you ever seen. That's the kind of a cock-a-doodle-do I am!"

"You say you were Red Jim's pard?" asked Shasta.

"Yes, that's jist what ye heerd me whisper," shouted Texas Joe, "an' I want ye to step right outside heur, an' s' ttle accounts!"

"Perhaps you were his pard about seven years ago," said Shasta, "when Captain Frisco led you to massacre four miners."

Texas Joe's face turned to a sickly yellow hue, and for an instant his hand dropped. Bill Tappan was quick to take advantage of the moment, and wheeling him around he thrust his revolver under his nose, and cried:

"Now! Now, ye p'izen whelp! We'll see who holds th' best hand in this heur little game! Let that 'ar gun drap right down onto th' floor, er else I'll bore ye, fer sart'in!"

The bully allowed the weapon to fall from his hand.

"That's th' tune, me noble dook," cried Bill.

"Now, pard Shaster, jest wipe th' floor with him."

"That's jest what I want him to do," shouted the bully. "I want him to walk right in an' maul me all up. Come on, ye big galoot," he cried, reaching out with a sudden movement and slapping Shasta in the face with the back of his hand.

The blow took Shasta completely by surprise, but, white with rage at the insult, he sprung forward instantly, grasped the bully and threw him to the floor, falling upon him with his knees upon his breast.

"Ye'd better kill me while ye've got th' chance," the man gasped, "fer if ye don't I'll shoot ye th' first time I kin git the drap on ye."

"I do not want to kill you," said Shasta, "but I will mark you for life, so that I may know you when we meet." And drawing his knife, the one that he had taken from Red Jim's belt, he cut a wedge-shaped piece from each of the man's ears.

Texas Joe screamed with pain, and tried to free himself, but Shasta held him firmly until the work was done, and then he allowed him to get up.

Crazed with rage and pain, the bully sprung upon him, but Shasta caught him and sent him spinning at least a dozen yards away, where he fell to the floor all in a heap, striking his head against the sharp corner of a table with force enough to render him senseless.

"Great Joshua!" exclaimed Tom Pratt. "You're a hull hoss, pard, an' I guess these heur citizens will soon begin to find it out!"

"It seems to be my misfortune to keep getting into trouble," said Shasta, "but when I am set upon I propose to defend and take care of myself. I am sorry, though, if I have killed this man too, but he brought it upon himself."

But Texas Joe was not dead.

At that moment the stage-coach arrived, and a great rush was instantly made for the door of the Primrose, in which Shasta was among the first to get out of the room, and in time to see the first passenger alight.

He was a tall, well-dressed, good-looking man, but at sight of him Shasta stepped back into the shadow, for he was none other than Henry Calley.

Shasta could hardly control himself, and subdue his desire to spring at the villain's throat, but he knew that it would not serve his purpose to do so, and therefore by a mighty effort he restrained his passion and remained unnoticed.

The next person to get out of the stage-coach was a man whom Shasta recognized instantly as an old schoolmate. His name was Paul Marvin. He was about Shasta's own age, and during their school-days they had always been great chums.

Shasta had not seen him since leaving Colchester with the party of gold-seekers years before, when he bade him good-by at the railroad station, but he

knew him at once. Paul was to have been one of that party, but the sudden death of his father precluded him.

With the other passengers this story has nothing to do.

The Primrose saloon was Hardpan's only hotel at this time, it having two or three sleeping-apartments, and one of these Henry Calley engaged for himself and Paul for the night, intending to go over to the Pearl in the morning.

Shasta Wildman did not re-enter the saloon, but calling his friend Bill Tappan to one side, he said:

"Is that man the president of the Pearl?"

"Yes," said Bill, "he's th' chap."

"Did you notice the other man?"

"Yes, but I don't know him."

"Well, my friend," said Shasta, "I want you to do me a favor. I want you to watch your chance, and as soon as you find that man alone, the one that carried the two hand-bags, you know, get him to come with you to the cabin. Tell him that an old friend from Colchester is waiting to see him."

"But s'pose he thinks there's a crook in my story, an' won't come?" suggested Bill.

"You don't know him," Shasta answered. "He will come. There is not a braver fellow in the world than he. Only be sure the other man is not by when you speak to him."

"All right; I'll take care of that part of it, an' I'll bring him to ye if I kin."

Shasta walked on to the cabin, and in about half an hour Bill appeared, in company with Paul Marvin.

"Heur's th' man that wants to see ye, pard," Bill said, "an' now I'll go back an' let ye have th' house to yerselves fer a while."

Shasta was sitting by the table, with his face buried in his hands, but as soon as Bill closed the door he raised his head.

"My God!" cried Paul, "it is Ralph Rowland!"

"Yes, Paul, it is I!"

The two shook hands warmly.

"But," exclaimed Paul, "you were reported dead. Henry Calley returned in '53, and said that you and the others were killed. He brought proof in the form of a newspaper clipping, which gave your names among the list of the killed in a brush with the Indians."

Shasta then told his friend the sad story as it is known to the reader, only reserving the name of the murderer.

"And now," he said, as he concluded, "read this." And he handed Paul the dying confession of Red Jim, or James Week, to which he had written the murderer's name in full.

"Can this be true?" Paul cried, springing to his feet, white to the lips.

"Yes, it is true!"

"And will you let him go unpunished?"

"If God spares my life, no!"

"And from this hour," said Paul, "I am with you. I have been his clerk, or private secretary, but from this hour forth I will have no more to do with him."

"Tell me, Paul," said Shasta, "what of my wife?"

The tears welled up into his friend's eyes, and he could hardly speak.

"Speak, man, speak!" cried Shasta. "She is not dead?"

"She is worse than dead."

"Worse than dead?" the poor man repeated. "Oh, my God! Tell me the worst!"

"She is his wife!"

With an almost scream as of mortal pain, Shasta drew his knife and sprung toward the door, but his friend stopped him, and at last persuaded him to sit down again. But he could only wring his hands and moan, like a woman when in great distress.

"Tell me all," he demanded at length, and Paul did. He told him how Henry Calley had returned home with the news of the death of Ralph and the Raesons; of poor Mrs. Raesoner's death; of the great sorrow and sympathy expressed by Calley; and, last of all, how he had gained the respect and honor, if not the love, of Mary and had married her.

"And where is she now?" asked Shasta.

"She is in San Francisco."

"And does she love—him?"

"I have been with him three years," said Paul, "and I have seen a great deal of their domestic life. There is a picture of yourself hanging in the library, and I have seen her stand and look upon that with an expression of love in her eyes such as I have never seen there when she looks at him. I have seen him glance at the picture, too; and one day he asked why it was that the eyes of the picture always followed him about the room. 'Not that picture in particular,' he added, 'but any picture.'"

"I remember telling him a story I had heard once, about a murderer who was brought to the gallows through asking the same question, and I thought he would faint."

"He said it was a pain in his side, and soon left the room, and I thought no more about it. But now I can understand the real cause of his sudden weakness."

"I suppose he is very rich," said Shasta.

"Well, yes, and no. He is well off, and yet he has enough paper afloat to swamp him in a moment, if he should fail to be prompt with the interest it calls for."

"Will you leave him?"

"I will, and at once."

"Then," said Shasta, "join me. I am as rich as any man ever need be, will give you double the pay you now receive, and together we will bring Henry Calley to account."

The two friends shook hands, and the two hunters entering a moment later, saw them with their hands

raised, as though they were vowing before heaven to wreak a terrible vengeance upon the foul murderer.

Paul Marvin went at once to the Primrose, and going to Henry Calley's room, notified him that their business connection was ended. And when the stage-coach departed from Hardpan next morning, Paul Marvin and Shasta Wildman were among its passengers.

PART SECOND.

[CALIFORNIA, 1861.]

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE DEAL.

HENRY CALLEY, president and general manager of the Pearl Mining Company, was seated in his handsomely-furnished private office in the company's building, which was situated near the Pearl mine, in the growing town of Three Sisters, as the place had been very appropriately named—in honor of the three hills that inclosed it, when a clerk entered and announced that a man was in the outer office waiting to see him on very important business.

"Show him in," said the president, and in a few moments the gentleman appeared.

"Ah!" the president exclaimed, "glad to see you, Mr. Marvin! Have you repented of the hasty manner in which you left me last year, and come back for the position again? If so," and he smiled in a sneering manner as he spoke, "I must inform you that there is no place for you."

Without paying any attention to the president's remarks, Paul Marvin produced a small package of papers, and said:

"I have here a number of papers which the owner of the Diamond mine desired me to lay before you to-day."

"The Diamond mine, eh?" said Calley as he took the package. "Let's see; that's a mine some miles from here that commenced operations last month, is it not?"

"Yes," said Paul; "that is the mine."

"And you are connected with the Diamond, eh?"

"Yes; I am the manager of it."

"Manager? Well, you are getting up in the world. And who is the owner?"

"Mr. Shasta Wildman, of San Francisco," Paul replied.

"Wildman—Wildman?" the president of the Pearl repeated thoughtfully. "Where have I heard that name before? Oh! yes, I remember. He's the man you went off with when you left me. I heard a great deal about him at Hardpan. He killed a man there, I believe. But, no matter; I don't care who he is."

Calley had opened the package of papers while speaking, and when he caught sight of its contents his face grew white.

"How came all these notes into your hands?" he fairly gasped.

"I told you, sir, that Mr. Wildman desired me to present them," said Paul.

"But where did he get them?"

"A question of that kind had better be put to the gentleman himself, sir. I am acting under his instructions."

"Well, I am not prepared to pay the interest to-day. Such business as this is usually transacted at my San Francisco office. You should have presented this trifling matter there."

"The notes were presented there," said Paul, "and we were referred to you. It is but a trifling affair, as Mr. Wildman said, and as you have just said yourself. The notes only amount to two hundred and twenty thousand dollars, principal and interest to date, and—"

"Great Scott!" cried Calley, springing to his feet, "I thought you wanted to renew them. You don't mean to demand the principal, do you?"

"Certainly. Mr. Wildman thinks it too small a sum to hold over and bother with. He said to me yesterday he wished the rest were due, so that he could make one job of it. Such a sum is nothing to him."

"The rest!" cried Calley. "Does he hold any more of these infernal scraps?"

"Yes, he has more of them. They amount in all to about five hundred thousand dollars, I believe."

Henry Calley sunk back into his chair.

"There is some sort of trickery in all this," he said.

"This man Wildman is trying to push me to the wall for some reason or other, and you are aiding him. No other man knew where to find all these papers than you and I, and you have bought them up. What's the object in it?"

The president of the Pearl had made a correct guess.

"There is no secret about it," said Paul; "and since you seem to think there is trickery in it, I will explain the whole affair."

"Mr. Wildman wanted to get hold of some Pearl stock. The stock is A 1, and can hardly be bought for love or money. I knew of these notes of yours, and that you own enough stock in the mine to cover their face, and when I told Mr. Wildman this he bade me gather them up. I did so, and here they are, or a part of them, at least."

"With us, Mr. Calley, there is no need of beating about the bush. I know your condition. Of ready cash you have but little, comparatively speaking, while of Pearl stock you own just about enough to cover the notes you have afloat. You could hardly be induced to sell those stocks, but you must redeem these notes, and your only means of doing it is to offer your Pearl stock in exchange."

"Mr. Wildman further desired me to say that if

Shasta, the Gold King.

CHAPTER II.

A BAITED HOOK SWALLOWED.

A FEW days subsequent to the events recorded above, Mr. Henry Calley, president of the Pearl Mining Company, called at the office of the Diamond mine, where he found Shasta Wildman seated in his private office.

Paul Marvin introduced them.

The president of the Pearl extended his hand, but Shasta, in the act of handing him a chair, did not recognize it, and so it passed that they did not shake hands; although it was managed so adroitly that Calley failed to perceive that the slight was intentional.

He found Shasta Wildman to be a large, heavily-bearded man, wearing a white, broad-brimmed, soft felt hat.

Mr. Calley was very affable.

"I am happy to meet and know you, Mr. Wildman," he said, "very happy indeed. I have called over this morning to see you upon a little matter of business that interests us both, and that is—the shipping of our bullion to market."

"No doubt you have heard the report that the route is infested by a gang of road-agents, under the leadership of the once notorious Captain Frisco, who are robbing every traveler who happens along."

"Yes," returned Shasta, "my manager, Mr. Marvin, was robbed a few days ago of some valuable papers and personal effects, while coming back from a trip to Three Sisters, where he went to see you on a matter of business."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Calley. "You don't mean to say he was robbed of the Pearl stock that he carried?"

"Exactly so!"

Calley looked surprised.

"Something has got to be done!" he cried, bringing his fist down upon the desk with a bang. "Only the day before yesterday I sent some bullion to market, and in less than three hours my men came back and declared they had been robbed."

"And that's what brings me here this morning. I wanted to see if we couldn't arrange to join forces when we ship our gold. Our men could meet at Hardpan, and from there travel together, thus making quite a strong party. What do you think of it?"

"I agree with you," Shasta replied, "and whenever you ship, if you let me know, I will join you."

"Now that's what I call getting right at the thing!" Calley exclaimed. "And if we don't make it warm for Captain Frisco, I'd like to know it!"

"I want to send some bullion to-morrow. Will it suit you to ship then?"

"As well as any other time."

"And you'll join force with us?"

"I will."

"I've been thinking this thing over a little," announced Calley, "and I think if we can get our gold over to Hardpan early in the day, and arrange to leave there about dark, we may give the fellow the slip altogether."

"Set your own time and I will conform to it."

"Very well, then, suppose we arrange to have our men leave Hardpan an hour after sundown to-morrow evening."

"My men will be there."

"All right. And I think Mr. Frisco will meet with a warm reception."

"By the way, I suppose you will offer a reward for his capture and for the return of the Pearl stock, will you not?"

"Well," said Shasta, "I hardly know. If it were not that I want the Pearl stock, I would not consider the sum worth bothering with, or about. But the stock I must have. Perhaps I may offer a trifling reward. I will see."

Henry Calley had come to the Diamond mine with two objects in view. One of these he has explained. The other object was to learn for himself whether the Pearl stock was in Wildman's hands or not. He had had an idea that it was, but when he went away he firmly believed that it was not. Where was it, then? That, to him, was an all-important question.

At the appointed time next evening, the two parties set out from Hardpan upon their journey to the nearest express station, which was about sixty miles distant. At this time there was no express-office either at Hardpan or Three Sisters, although preparations were being made to open one at the latter place within a few weeks.

The men were all well-armed, and as they rode along they loudly bragged, each of his own personal prowess, and boasted of what Captain Frisco might expect, if he came in their way.

They were riding leisurely along at an easy canter, and were just turning a sharp bend in the road, when, from a dozen throats, came the ringing order:

"Hands up!"

It was a surprise complete.

The "agents" were stationed on either side of the narrow road, and their pistols covered every man in the party, whose hands were instantly raised aloft. Then the leader took up a position in the middle of the road, ordered the men to ride forward, one at a time, and as they did so he disarmed each one in his turn, and robbed him.

This being done at length, the robber chief ordered them to turn about and start upon the back trail to Hardpan, and the discomfited and crest-fallen expressmen obeyed his command without a word.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the leader, as the men disappeared in the darkness. "I guess they will find Captain Frisco is as good at his business as he ever was. Come, my men, let's away to our retreat and divide the spoil."

The masked captain wheeled and dashed away

down the trail, followed by his men, and then from behind a large rock rode forth an Indian.

He was mounted upon a black horse, whose hoofs were muffled, being wrapped in strips of blanket and pieces of bearskin.

He rode down the trail after the road-agents, keeping them well in sight, while his horse galloped along without making a sound.

The Indian leaned forward in his saddle, his eyes constantly fixed upon the party ahead, as though in the darkness he could see their every movement.

It was not a dark night though, for the moon was up, but being cloudy it was one of those nights when shadows are apt to confuse the sense of sight, and although in general appearance it seemed quite light it was hard to tell the character of an object at any great distance away. But the eyes of the Indian seemed to be unusually sharp.

For some time he followed the robbers in this manner, and then as they approached a narrow stream of water he came to a sudden halt.

The road-agents went on, but a moment later a man stepped out into the road and picked up two packages which the leader had dropped, and which the quick eyes of the Indian had detected at the instant.

As soon as he had secured the two packages the man turned and started up the trail, the Indian drawing back into the shadow and allowing him to pass by, and then, when he had gained a little distance, turned and followed him.

For perhaps two miles more the man plodded steadily along, and then he turned away from the main road to Hardpan and struck off across country toward Three Sisters.

The Indian abandoned his horse at once; and followed on foot.

Two hours later the town of Three Sisters was seen, as the two men appeared upon the side of one of the three hills, and then the leader changed his course. Instead of entering the town he turned away to the right, keeping along the side of the hill until he came to a point where side by side grew two sturdy pines, the only trees on the whole hill-side.

Taking a direct line from these two trees the man crossed the narrow plateau upon which they stood and approached the rocky side of the hill, turned to make sure that he was still in a line with the trees, and then reaching up he placed the two packages into a narrow fissure in the rock. This done, he turned and descended the hill toward the town.

The Indian remained standing in the shadow close to the two trees, and when the man had disappeared from sight he sat down upon the ground, leaning his back against a small boulder for support, and waited.

He had been unable to see the man's face, owing to the fact that he was masked, but he had been close enough to him several times to discover that each of his ears had a deep notch cut in it.

For two hours or more he sat there as motionless as the rock itself, and then he heard footsteps approaching.

A man soon appeared in sight, he, too, wearing a mask like the first. He walked straight to the side of the hill, took particular care to bring himself in a line with the trees, and then reaching up his hand he drew the packages out from the hiding-place where the first man had put them.

"Ha!" he muttered, "you are a greater fool than I took you to be, Texas Joe! Why didn't you clear out with the whole pile? Why, I hardly expected to find the stuff here at all! When I let it go out of my hands I never expected to see it again. You are too honest, Joe, to get along in this world, too honest, by half."

While muttering thus to himself the man had paced off twenty yards to the right, and there he stopped, reached up, and once more the two packages of bullion were carefully laid away. Then this man, as the first had done, descended toward the town.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed as he started. "You're said to be smart, Texas Joe, but you'll find me equally as smart, or my name is not Captain Frisco!"

When this man was out of sight the Indian rose up, stretched his limbs, and started back the way he had come. When he reached the spot where he had left his horse he found the patient animal still there, and mounting it he rode straight to the Diamond mine.

Meantime Captain Frisco had entered the town of Three Sisters, and going direct to a low saloon called the Black Hawk, he met Texas Joe.

The captain still wore his mask.

"Well, Joe," said he, "did you find the gold where I dropped it, and did you conceal it where we agreed?"

"Yes," answered Joe, "I found it an' put it whar you said."

"That's right. Let's go up and get it, and then we'll divide it, share and share alike."

"I'm with ye," declared Joe, and they started off. "I always thought you wur purty square, Cap, even though you did skin us once."

"Yes, Joe," assumed Frisco, "I'm square with you now. You see that other job was a bad one, and I was afraid to stay around a minute longer than I could help. But I'll make it all up to you this time."

When they reached the two pine trees on the side of the hill, Captain Frisco ordered:

"Now, Joe, fetch it forth."

Joe took a straight line from the trees to the face of the rock, reached up and placed his hand in the narrow fissure, but withdrew it again instantly with an exclamation of surprise.

"Thunder! Cap," he cried, "it's gone!"

you will take all the notes he holds at once, he will throw off one-third of the interest due.

"What say you?"

"But your object? What is the object?"

"Simply, as I said, to get hold of Pearl stock. You have just enough of it, at its present value, to redeem these scraps, and we want it."

"But why does Wildman want it?"

"That is another question for him to answer."

"And if I refuse?"

"But you won't. You can't. You can send us to law, of course, but that would only show your financial condition up in its true light, and who do you think would win?"

"Curses upon you!" cried Calley, bringing his fist down upon the table. "There's something back of all this! But, go on, play your hand out, and then we'll see who takes the stake. Bring the cursed notes to-morrow, and the stock shall be yours."

"Shall I bring all of them, or only these that are due?"

"Bring all of them. Every cent's worth you've got."

At an appointed hour the next day Paul Marvin was on hand at the office of the Pearl mine, but the president was not there to meet him. He had been called suddenly away on very urgent business, so a clerk said, but he—the clerk—was instructed to act for him in the exchange of the stock for the notes.

It was late in the day, and by the time the business was transacted the sun was low in the west.

Paul bound the valuable papers securely together in a small package, and then went to the Mountain Rest Hotel, as Three Sisters' noted *posada* was called, where he ate supper, after which he mounted his horse and started back to the Diamond mine.

It was night by this time, but the moon was shining brightly, and he was able to travel at pretty good speed.

He had covered more than half the distance, and was about to enter a narrow pass through which the road lay, when he was suddenly confronted by two masked men, who held cocked and leveled pistols in their hands.

"Hands up!"

Paul dropped the rein instantly, and held up his hands as ordered.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want whatever you've got with you that is of any value," said the leader, "so keep as quiet as a mouse and be as gentle as a lamb while my pard goes through ye."

The other masked man rode forward and took Paul's revolvers from his belt, and then searched his pockets, taking the package of papers, his watch, the little money that he carried, and even going so far as to remove a stud from his bosom that was not worth more than twenty dollars, at most.

While this was being done, Paul tried hard to penetrate the mask, but was unable to do so. All that he could see of the man's face was his eyes. But the fellow's ears were not covered, and in each of them Paul saw a deep notch, which looked as though a piece had been cut out with a knife.

When they had relieved their victim of all they considered worth taking, they told him to ride on, and, there being no other course open to him, he did.

But the game did not end here.

The two highwaymen waited until the hoof-strokes of Paul's horse were dying away in the distance, and then they turned their horses and started toward Three Sisters.

"That wur th' easiest job I ever tackled," said one. "Why, he didn't even say Boo! We took th' sand right out of him."

"Yes," said the other, "and I was surprised. I expected he would make a fuss about it. I imagined he had more grit."

"Oh, we didn't give him no show! We picked him up afore he fell, as it wur, an'—"

"Hands up!"

"Whoa!" cried the two robbers, drawing rein so suddenly that their horses were thrown back upon their haunches, for right before them was a man on horseback, masked, and holding a revolver in each hand, aimed straight at their breasts.

Needless to say their hands went up.

Then stepped forth an Indian from behind some bushes, he also wearing a mask, and leveled a rifle at the helpless men.

Not a word was spoken.

The mounted man then rode forward, disarmed the men, and searched their pockets. And, strange as it may seem, he took only that which had been taken from Paul Marvin only a few minutes before, not a copper more or less, except their pistols!

When this was done, he rode away, leaving the Indian there still, and he, after waiting until the retreating horse was out of hearing, slung his rifle over his shoulder and stalked away into the woods.

"Wal, I'm blowed!" cried one of the two men, as he lowered his hands and drew a long breath; while the other expressed his sentiments in a volley of oaths that would have shamed and astonished a South Sea pirate.

Straight ahead rode the last robber, down the road and into the pass, and on reaching the other end of the pass, he was joined by Paul Marvin.

"What luck, Shasta, my bold highwayman?" Paul cried. "Did you capture it?"

"Yes," replied Shasta Wildman, for it was he, "I got every penny of it. Here are your pistols. Our plans have worked like a charm, and everything has turned out just as I expected it would."

Strange proceedings, very.

Captain Frisco smiled beneath his mask to see the expression of surprise that Joe's face assumed, but he had his part to play, and drawing a pistol from his belt he sprung forward and placed the muzzle against Joe's head, exclaiming:

"You lie! curse you—you lie! You've hid it somewhere else, and are trying to make me believe some one has taken it! I'll give you just ten seconds to tell me where it is!"

Joe was thoroughly frightened, and he leaned back against the rocky wall as pale as a ghost.

"I put it thar, pard," he gasped, "and I'll swar to it by all th' Dutch in Holland! But it's gone."

"You lie!" cried Frisco. "You did *not* put it there! You've hid it in some other place."

"No, pard; I'm a-tellin' ye th' truth, as straight as a string. I put it right thar in that hole. Why, d'ye s'pose if I'd meant to act crooked an' steal it that I'd 'a' come heur at all? Not much! I'd 'a' struck out with it soon's I got my fingers onto it."

"If I was sure you are lying, Joe, I'd kill you as quick as a wink."

"I know it, Cap; but I'm a-givin' ye th' genuine essence of truth, straight."

Captain Frisco put away his revolver.

"Well," he said, "if you *did* put it there, some one must have seen you do it."

"I don't see how else it kin be," concluded Joe.

"You see," added Frisco, "we had it all drawn down to a fine point. You was to lie behind the big rock near the creek, while I and the boys robbed the expressman. Then when we came along I was to drop the packages of bullion, you was to pick them up, bring them here and put them into that hole, which you say you did. That was all straight; but now they're gone."

"I had some doubts about trusting you, Joe, but I couldn't do anything else."

"There was the very deuce to pay when I and the boys got to our stronghold, and I made believe I'd lost the gold, and we all went back to look for it, but of course didn't find it. I gave them the rest of the plunder, though, and promised them better luck next time."

"Now, Joe, it is for us to find that gold. I won't say you've got it hid away, because I can't prove it; but you can't blame me if I don't put much faith in you for a while."

"One thing more, Joe; you are the only one of the band who has ever seen my face. Don't let the boys know what you know. If you keep the secret well, it will be money into your pocket."

"I'm mum, boss," Joe replied; "an' I wish I could prove that I was on th' square 'bout that gold. But I was, Cap—I swear it!"

The two men returned to Three Sisters; Joe with a heavy heart, and Captain Frisco exultant over the success of his well-laid plans.

But a master hand was pulling the wire on which these puppets danced, and Captain Frisco had swallowed a baited hook, as the reader shall see anon.

Next morning Henry Calley rushed over to the Diamond mine, filled and overflowing with righteous indignation, and swearing vengeance eternal against Captain Frisco.

"Something has got to be done!" he cried.

"Offer a reward, sir; offer a reward," Shasta Wildman quietly suggested.

It was a striking scene. Each man was playing his part to perfection. But the reader, who knows the secrets of both, must let his own imagination paint the picture.

CHAPTER III.

ASTOUNDING NEWS FOR HENRY CALLEY.

Two days later, for reasons best known to himself, Shasta Wildman took up his abode in the Mountain Rest Hotel, at Three Sisters. And on that same day the following notice was posted up in the public room of that popular house:

"\$20,000 REWARD!"

"The above named reward will be paid to any person or persons who will capture the road-agent,

CAPTAIN FRISCO,

and deliver him to me, alive, with positive proof of his guilt.

SHASTA WILDMAN.

"Mountain Rest Hotel."

Henry Calley was among the first to read the notice after it was put up, and for an instant he turned slightly pale, but seeing Shasta approaching he recovered his composure, as he remarked:

"Great guns, man! you don't mean to go twenty thousand dollars on it, do you? Why, it's a fortune! I thought of offering five thousand, but *twenty*—*where*!"

"To some men it may be a fortune," returned Shasta, "but to me it is nothing. I want some one to take an interest in the game, and therefore I make the reward an object worthy of a little labor."

"But, why do you want the man delivered to you?"

"Because," Shasta replied, "I fancy he and I have an old account to settle. And if he is the man I think he is, he had better a thousand times be dead than fall into my hands."

Calley trembled in every limb, and grasped the back of a chair to steady himself, while he tried hard to answer as calmly as possible:

"Well, sir, of course you must know your own business better than I, but I fail to comprehend how any living man can have done you *that* amount of personal injury. I was about to go over to my office when this notice attracted my attention. Will you accompany me?"

"If it were necessary I would give my entire fortune to have him in my power," Shasta answered. "But this must certainly fail to interest you, Mr.

Calley, so I will not trouble you with any more remarks on the subject. No, I can not go with you just now, but I may call in and see you during the day."

"Very well, sir," Calley remarked, as he turned to go, "I will be glad to see you at any time."

Henry Calley entered his private office and sat down, his brain fairly in a whirl. Could it be possible that Shasta Wildman really knew who Captain Frisco was? And if so, who was *he*? and where had Captain Frisco ever crossed his path? For a long time he sat in a brown study, but at last he laughed aloud at his foolish fears, and turned to his business. At that moment a clerk entered and handed him a card.

"Wilson Jaques, private detective," Calley read aloud, and added:

"Show him in at once."

Wilson Jaques entered. He was a tall, slim, well-dressed man, with open face and fearless blue eyes.

"How are you, Jaques?" Calley exclaimed, extending his hand; "I'm glad to see you. But what is it that brings you up here? Have you found the woman?"

Jaques shook hands with Calley, and then sat down, saying:

"You've hit the nail right on the head, Mr. Calley, for I've found her."

"The deuce you say!" cried Calley, springing up. "Where is she?"

"She is in San Francisco. But, let me go over the ground at length. Not that it's necessary, but it's a way we professionals have, you know. I will begin at the beginning:

"About a year ago—I can give you the day, date and hour by referring to my note-book, but will not go so far as that—About a year ago you called me into your service. You had just returned from a trip up here to your mine, and found your wife missing. She had suddenly disappeared, leaving no clew as to why she had gone, or where she had gone to. I took the case up. The last that had been seen of her was when she and her boy entered a carriage at the door, and were driven away, and the last person to see her was the footman who opened the door for her."

"Taking note of every fact I could get hold of I found that at a certain hour on a certain night a carriage had taken a lady and a boy to the wharf of the Western Steamship Company, where they took passage for New York on board the Golden Gate."

"I thought I was upon the right track."

"I informed you of the clew, and you started me overland to intercept them."

"I reached New York two days before the Golden Gate was due, and five days later the steamer arrived. I was on hand, of course, and the lady and the boy came, but she was not your wife. She was the wife of one of the owners of the Western Steamship Line, a fact which I might have ascertained if I hadn't gone off half-cocked; but the best of us will err."

"By the time I got back to San Francisco your wife had had time enough to reach the end of the earth, and having no clew to guide me, active search was given up."

"Three weeks ago to-day, however, I happened to pass the Cane mansion, that's the finest residence in the city, you know, when, on glancing toward the house, I saw your wife and her boy standing side by side in one of the large bay-windows."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Calley.

"That's the very word I used myself," said the detective. "I knew her the moment I saw her. It would be strange if Wilson Jaques *didn't* know the handsomest woman in San Francisco, by sight, at least, and I took up the trail again at once."

"Placing a man to watch the house I went to a friend in the real estate line and asked who owned the place, and he informed me that it had been bought some months before by a man named Shasta Wildman, who—"

"Great heaven!" cried Calley, "who *can* that man be?"

"Eh?"

"Nothing, nothing. Go on with your story."

"Well, as I was about to say, this Wildman had paid one million dollars, solid cash, for the place."

"I went back to the mansion and rung the bell. A six-foot-tall dandy came to the door, and I asked to see Mrs. Henry Calley."

"Who, sah?" he asked.

"Mrs. Henry Calley," said I.

"Da's no such pussen here, sah," said he.

"You lie," said I, "for I saw her at the window."

"Dat wa' Missus Wildman, sah," he said.

"Then," said I, "it's Mrs. Wildman that I want to see!"

"But," said he, "Missus Wildman don't see nobody, sah. Dese two gemmen will show you to de gate, sah!"

"Two more big blacks appeared, and, knowing that if I didn't go at once they would assist me, I went. And, here I am."

"And are you *sure* it was my wife?"

"It was no one else."

"And what will you do now?"

"That is just what I came up here to find out. I've found the woman for you, and now you may discharge me, or engage my services for other moves in the game, as you please."

"What would you advise me to do?" Calley asked.

"Well," the detective answered, "if you want the woman, I would say, Go and take her. She's your property, so to speak, and the law will give her to you. It is my opinion she is held a prisoner, and has not deserted you of her own will."

"I don't see how I can be of any further use in this case, Mr. Calley, and I'd like to be discharged."

The house is being watched, and the woman can't be taken away without my men knowing where she is taken to; so, in case you don't find her there when you go for her, call at my office and you will then be able to put your finger upon her in no time."

"That seems to be about the only way to do it, Jaques," decided Calley, "and as you want to get out of the case—what's your bill?"

The detective presented his bill, and it was paid at once.

"You see, Call-y," he added, "I've got something else on hand. I see there is a reward of twenty-thousand dollars offered for the capture of a road-agent called Captain Frisco, and I don't think I will ever find a better chance to win a fortune, so I'm going for him."

"I'm glad to hear it," declared Calley. "In fact, I was going to mention it to you. This Captain Frisco has made several rich hauls already, and we want him put out of the way. I hope you'll have success in hunting him down."

"Oh, I'll collar him," averred Jaques, as he rose up to go. "I'll have him within a week. Good-day, sir!"

"Good-day" and the moment the door was closed Calley fell into another deep reverie.

But, ponder as he would, he could not fathom the depths of the great sea over which he was drifting.

One thing was plain, and that was, that he was comparatively a beggar, having only his salary as president of the Pearl Mining Company to fall back upon, and even that was in danger of being lost to him as soon as it became known that he was no longer a stockholder.

Another thing certain was, that it would not be safe for Captain Frisco to appear again.

But when his thoughts turned upon Shasta Wildman he became dazed at once. Even if the truth had suggested itself to his bewildered brain, he would have cast it aside, and not having the slightest clew to work upon he could only stumble along in the dark.

It was then that the ghosts of past years came trooping before his mind, and he felt the ground slipping from beneath his very feet. A sword seemed to be hanging over his head, and that sword was held by the strong arm of Shasta Wildman.

For a long time he sat in silent thought, and then he raised his head and laughed.

"What a fool I am," he muttered. "The only care I need have at present is to keep an eye upon Wilson Jaques, confound him! and I guess I can easily do that. I am a fool to allow my idle fers to unnerve me so. Bah! I will fight it to the end!"

At that moment Shasta Wildman was announced by the clerk.

CHAPTER IV.

SHASTA FALLS INTO A TRAP.

"Show the gentleman in," said Calley, in a firm voice, for he meant to take the bull by the horns, as it were, and test his strength. "And," he added, "go over to the hotel and see why the flag is not flying on the cupola. Tell them to run it up at once!"

"I thought I would take advantage of your invitation to call, and drop in for a few minutes," said Shasta, as he entered. "You've got quite a cozy place here, Mr. Calley."

"Yes," said Calley, briefly, "it will pass. Take a chair. I have an important matter to speak to you about, Mr. Wildman, and I was on the point of stepping over to the Mountain Rest to see you." And he assumed all the pomposity of manner that he was able to command.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Shasta, with a look of surprise. "Is anything wrong?"

"Take a chair, sir, take a chair," said Calley, "for what I have to say will occupy several minutes."

"Go ahead, sir," said Shasta, "I will stand. From your manner the 'matter' must be quite a serious one, and my presence seems to be distasteful to you."

"The first time I ever heard of you, sir," Calley began, "was at Hardpan, about a year ago. I arrived there by the stage-coach one evening, and you went away from there in the next morning. My private secretary, Paul Marvin, deserted me the same night that we arrived there, and went away with you."

"Quite true," Shasta assented.

"Yes, sir," said Calley, "quite true."

"When I left San Francisco on that trip, I left my wife at home. When I returned there three weeks later she was *not* at home, nor have I seen her since."

"I employed a detective to find her, but he was wholly unsuccessful until three weeks ago, when, by the merest chance he discovered her hiding-place, or rather the place where she is kept a prisoner."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, a *prisoner*. Will you tell me where your residence in San Francisco is, Mr. Wildman?"

"Certainly. It is the place widely known as the Cane estate. You know where it is, no doubt."

"Exactly. Well, my detective saw my wife and her boy in that house."

"Then she has a boy?" said Shasta. "You did not mention that."

"Curse the boy!" cried Calley, "it's the *woman* I am talking about! What have you to say?"

"My dear sir," said Shasta, "you are allowing your temper to get the best of you. It is running away with your judgment. I know nothing about your wife, sir; didn't even know that you had a wife."

"But I have, sir, and she is a prisoner in your house."

"Mr. Calley, I would be justified in taking umbrage at your remarks, but I know that you are la-

Shasta, the Gold King.

boring under a mistake. You have been misinformed. The lady your detective saw was no doubt my wife."

Calley was forced to back down a little.

"It is very strange," he said. "Mr. Jaques, the detective, knows my wife by sight and declares it was she he saw."

"And I say again that he was mistaken," said Shasta. "There is nothing more that can be said by either of us, without going too far."

"True," said Calley, "but I have here a picture of my wife. It was taken some years ago, yet you can easily tell whether the resemblance between her and your wife is strong enough to account for such a mistake being made." And as he spoke he produced a small daguerreotype from a drawer in his desk, and handed it to Shasta.

This scene in the act was worthy a place upon the boards of any theater in the world.

The picture was one that Mary Raesoner had had taken shortly before her marriage to Ralph Rowland.

Both men were standing. Calley with both hands resting upon the top of his desk, leaning slightly forward, and Shasta with the daguerreotype held at arm's length in his right hand, while his left hand clutched his breast.

To him it was a trying ordeal. The blood coursed through his veins like living fire, and he longed to spring upon the wretch before him and tear his heart from his bosom. But after a moment's pause he conquered the desire, and returned the picture.

"Well," said Calley, "what do you say? You seem to recognize the face."

"If I was upon my oath," Shasta replied, "I would swear positively that it is the likeness of my wife, as she was some twelve years or more ago."

"Then you can hardly blame Jaques for the mistake he has made. If I was too hasty a few moments ago, and said unpleasant things, I beg your pardon, sir. But is it not an astonishing affair? Why, if either of the ladies was to appear here at this moment I fear there would be serious trouble."

"There certainly would," Shasta replied. "It is indeed a remarkable resemblance. Twin sisters could not be more like each other than that picture is like my wife."

"Well, Mr. Wildman, sit down. There's no hard feelings, I hope."

"The mistake was a natural one," Shasta replied, "and we will let it pass as such." And he sat down.

"By the way," said Calley, "that reward of yours has attracted the attention of a professional detective. Mr. Jaques told me that he was going for it."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Shasta, "and I hope he'll win it. My advice to Captain Frisco would be to lay very low for a time."

"No doubt he will, as soon as he learns how highly he is valued. Mr. Jaques has the reputation of being a bad man when he gets after a rogue in earnest, and I suppose in this case he will work with a will, for the reward is a tempting one. Twenty thousand dollars! Whe-ee-ew!" and he gave vent to a shrill whistle. "I—"

But at this moment a great tramping of feet was heard in the outer office, the door of the private office was flung open and the two clerks rushed in, white as ghosts, closely followed by six men wearing masks.

"What means this?" cried Calley, as he sprung to his feet and drew a pistol.

"Hol' on, thar!" cried the leader, "we've got th' bulge on ye, old hoss, so jest sot right down thar an' keep mum!"

"What do you want?" Calley demanded.

"Wal, we don't want *you*, anyhow," was the reply. "We want this heur cuss," indicating Shasta Wildman, "an' we've got orders fer to fetch him, dead or alive!"

"Who wants me?" Shasta asked.

"Why, our boss, Cap'n Frisco. An' he's jest b'ilin' mad, too. He wants to see th' cuss that has got th' gall to offer a reward of twenty thousand dollars fer him. Will ye go 'long without any kick-in', an' not try to make a fuss? Ye'd better, I kin tell ye; fer if ye don't our orders is to salivate ye on th' spot."

"Having no choice in the matter," said Shasta, "I will go."

"All right! Now, boys, jist tie these heur other three, so's they can't raise a row an' set th' town after us, an' then we'll be off."

In a few minutes Calley and his two clerks were securely gagged and bound, and then the leader of the band said:

"Now, par'ds, take th' pris'n'r, git out th' back way an' scout along by them 'ar bushes, an' then we'll soon be safe out of town."

Shasta was disarmed, a gag was put into his mouth, and then with a man on each side of him he was led away.

When the town was left behind them the party turned their steps toward one of the three hills, and in a short time came to the plateau where stood the two lofty pines mentioned in a previous chapter.

Here the men halted, and Shasta was bound to one of the trees.

"Now," said the leader, "two of ye stay heur an' guard him, while th' rest of us goes to fetch th' cap'n."

"All right," said one of the men, as he and a companion threw themselves upon the ground, "go ahead. I guess he won't git away."

"It won't be well fer ye if he does. I kin tell ye that! But I guess thar's no danger. Come on, boys," and the leader and three of the men departed.

Shasta had been unable to catch even a glimpse of

the face of any one of them, but he noticed that the leader was the man whose ears were marked by the deep notches cut in them.

Half an hour later Texas Joe entered the office of the Pearl mine.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "nobody to home?"

He stepped across the room to the door of the private office, and looked in.

"Wal, by thunder!" he cried, "if you three fellers ain't in a purty fix! Who's been to see ye?" And as he spoke he drew his knife and severed the cords that held the men to their chairs, and then took the gags from their mouths.

The moment Calley was released he sprung to his feet and began to abuse the two clerks.

"This was all *your* fault!" he cried. "Why didn't you show fight when the men entered? Instead of that you came rushing in here like the helpless babes that you are, with the men at your heels, and we had no chance to defend ourselves at all. You didn't even give us any warning. Get out!" and he hurried the trembling young men out of the room.

But the instant the door closed behind them his whole manner changed, and giving Texas Joe a slap upon the back, he exclaimed:

"By George! Joe, you're a trump! I didn't think you *could* work it so well at such short notice. We'll soon fix Shasta Wildman so that he won't trouble us!"

"Blamed ef I wasn't kind of s'prised myself, to see how nice it worked," said Joe. "Soon's I seen th' flag go up I fetched th' boys right down heur, as you told me, an' then when you whistled—why, in we kem."

"Now," said Calley, "you hurry on to the Mountain Rest, raise a great hullabaloo about this affair and get a party started to rescue Wildman, being careful to set them upon a false trail. I'll soon be over there with my story, too. Then, to night, as soon as it is dark, we'll take *our* business in hand."

Texas Joe hurried from the room to carry out the instructions.

"The poor fool!" Calley muttered. "He's a good man for me, but I shall soon have no further use for him, and then—" And he tapped his revolver in a significant manner. "He's the only one that knows my secrets, and with him they shall die."

CHAPTER V.

MARY.

THE Cane mansion was, at the time of which I write, the finest private residence in San Francisco. It was a palace fit for a king.

Shasta Wildman had been informed that it was not for sale, but his munificent offer of a million dollars soon placed the property in his possession, for money will do what no other agency in the world can accomplish, and he would have paid the price had it been twice the amount. He was determined to have the place at any cost.

And it is to the Cane mansion that the reader's attention is now invited.

Seated in her cosy boudoir, or reclining, rather, in a great, satin-cushioned easy-chair, was Mary Rowland, the unfortunate wife of the hero of my story.

She was a queenly-looking woman, who did not appear to be more than twenty-six years of age—certainly not more than twenty-seven at most. Her features were regular and strikingly handsome, her complexion a rich pink and white, eyes large and blue, and her hair fell over her shapely shoulders like a mantle of golden sunshine.

Her eyes looked very soft and dreamy as she rested her head upon the back of the luxurious chair and gazed in a thoughtful manner at a pretty yellow-bird that swung in its cage near her, as though she was trying to penetrate the future, or else was reviewing the years that were gone, and comparing herself to the captive bird.

While she sat thus there came a tap at the door that awoke her from her day-dream, and one of her waiting-maids entered, bearing a letter, which she handed to her mistress and retired at once.

The lady broke the seal, and read as follows:

"MARY:—

"One month from the date of this I will be with you. Please to enter the parlor at seven o'clock in the evening, and be neither startled nor frightened at what you will see.

"YOUR HUSBAND."

She read the note through several times, and then laid it aside, saying:

"This is the first word I have received from my husband since that night, and I cannot understand it. *'Be neither startled nor frightened at what you will see.'* What mysterious meaning lies hidden there, I wonder?

"It is all a mystery from the very beginning. I have tried to fathom it, but I am unable to do so. Many times have I gone over the whole ground, scanning every word and action since that night, and before, but no key to the problem can I find. And now this note turns my mind to the subject again.

"Mr. Calley had gone up to his mine, taking Paul Marvin with him. He had been absent about six weeks, when one night a strange carriage drew up at the door, and a note was brought to me, reading:

"Go with Paul, and take your boy with you. Let no one know where you are going, nor with whom. Trust Paul fully, and do just as he directs. He is waiting in the carriage.

YOUR HUSBAND."

"I did as directed. Taking my boy with me I entered the carriage, where I found Paul Marvin waiting for me. He did not speak, however, till after the footman had closed the door and the carriage had started. Then I questioned him, but was

unable to get any satisfactory information. All he would say was 'Your safety demands that you obey your husband's letter.'

"When the carriage stopped it was before a house in the suburbs of the city, and knowing Paul as I did, and trusting him fully, I entered with little Ralph.

"Then it was that Paul made known to me that for one year I was to be a prisoner. He did not use the word, but that was his meaning. My every wish was to be granted, but I was not to hold any communication whatever with any person outside of the house, nor was I to go beyond its doors. It was my husband's orders, he said, with only the best motives of love and kindness, and was done for my own good and my future happiness.

"One strange thing that I cannot help noticing is, it is always '*your husband*,' and never Mr. Calley, as Paul always called him, nor Henry, as he usually signed himself. Yet this is his writing, I am sure," taking up the note again.

"Paul introduced the servants to me, and said afterward that any communication to my husband must be made through the butler to him, Paul. And that no letter directed to any other person would be allowed to leave the house.

"Of course I objected to any such arrangements, and wished to be taken to my husband at once, to fill my place at his side, be the danger what it might. But Paul said it was impossible. The arrangements would not be altered, and, willing or not, I must remain where I was.

"He spoke very kindly, but firmly.

"My every wish was granted, but for three months I did not go beyond the doors of my prison. I complained then of want of outdoor air and exercise, and within a week was removed here to the Cane mansion, and have been here since.

"Here I have outdoor air and sunshine in abundance, and would, were this mystery swept away, be happy.

"When I was brought here Paul Marvin said I was to be transferred from his care to the care of John, the old butler, whom he introduced to me; and I have not seen Paul since. Who John, the butler, is I don't know, but I am sure I have heard his voice before somewhere.

"He grants my every wish, no matter what, with certain exceptions and limitations regarding my freedom of action, and says he is instructed to provide whatever I desire. It is true I have never put this to a very severe test, although I have often thought I would—and now I will."

She rung a bell that stood upon a stand by her side, and a waiting-maid entered.

"Send John, the butler, to me at once," the lady said.

In a few minutes the man appeared.

"Go," said she, "and bring fifty thousand dollars to me at once!"

The man departed without a word.

"If it were not for the companionship of my darling boy," the lady continued, still speaking her thoughts aloud, I could never bear this terrible suspense. But it is only to continue for a month longer, and then—What then? This letter has only made the mystery even deeper than it was before."

And again she read and re-read the note she had received a few minutes previous.

"What *can* it mean? What am I to see that will startle, if not frighten me? I can only wait."

In the mean time John, the butler, who was an old, heavily-bearded man, went straight to the city office of the Diamond gold mine, where he was greeted with the greatest respect.

Making known his want to the chief clerk the two left the office and proceeded to a bank, where they drew the sum required.

Upon his return to the mansion the butler met his mistress in the drawing-room and laid the money before her.

"Is this the sum?" she asked, not a little surprised.

"It is," said the butler, simply.

"You may take it back, John, and deposit it where it was. I only wanted to test your ability."

"Very well," the butler answered, "I will do so. I think it would be unwise to keep so large a sum of money here. Not only have you tested my ability to provide for you, but you have learned your own strength, and also proved the value of your husband's word. Whatever you desire it is my orders to provide for you, even though it be twice fifty thousand dollars. Your husband is a man of his word, and you should strive to obey his wishes, for in the end all will be well."

Strange words those, from man to mistress, and the lady so considered them, although she offered no rebuke.

Who was this butler that had such power, and could presume so to speak?

CHAPTER VI.

TWO NARROW ESCAPES.

TEXAS JOE and his companions were barely beyond hearing distance, when Shasta Wildman beheld the head and shoulders of an Indian, as they appeared in sight from behind a large boulder a short distance from where he stood. The Indian was looking straight at him, and was none other than his friend Eagle-Eye.

The moment Shasta turned his eyes upon him the Indian nodded, and drawing a revolver he tapped it and pointed toward the two men who, wholly unconscious of the nearness of a foe, were reclining upon the ground.

Shasta shook his head in the negative.

The Indian then replaced the revolver in his belt and drew his knife, making the same gesture as before, but again did Shasta refuse to give the signal

of approval that would have been the sentence of death to his two guardsmen.

The Indian looked surprised. But his face lighted up again instantly when Shasta glanced down at his bonds, and he made a motion with his knife as though to sever them, to which Shasta instantly nodded assent.

Eagle-Eye disappeared behind the boulder.

A moment later, however, he reappeared, visible from where Shasta stood but not perceivable to the two outlaws, and raising his hand he flung a large stone across the plateau.

The stone struck the wall at an angle, fell to the ground with a startling noise, and then rolled down the hill with clatter enough for a company of troopers at full gallop.

At the first sound the two guardsmen sprang to their feet and glanced in the direction whence it came, turned almost instantly and looked toward their prisoner to see that he was still safe, and then, pistols in hand, they rushed to the edge of the plateau and glanced down.

And then it was that the Indian sprang from cover, cut the cords that held his master, placed his revolvers into his hands, and instantly retired again behind the boulder, unobserved.

From the throwing of the stone to this time, scarcely ten seconds had elapsed. The two outlaws were peering down at the yet rolling stone, but their prisoner was now a free man, and armed.

A few seconds more and the stone disappeared, and then the two men turned around, only to face two cocked revolvers in the hands of Shasta Wildman.

"Drop your weapons!" he ordered.

The weapons dropped. Two men more thoroughly astonished never were seen. A few moments before they had beheld the man securely bound to the tree. They turned away for a space of perhaps ten or twenty seconds. They looked again, and lo! the man was not only free, but armed. To them it seemed little short of a miracle. They could not account for it.

"Unbuckle your belts and let all your weapons drop to the ground," said Shasta, and the men obeyed with the greatest alacrity.

"Now, you fellow with the big hat, back yourself up against that tree and let your partner tie you. Make haste, you other cuss, and don't fool about it, for I can easily tell whether you are tying good knots. And if either of you makes a hostile movement, or attempts to run away, I will shoot you with less compunction than I would a dog."

The men lost no time in obeying the orders, and in a few minutes one of them was bound to the tree. Then Shasta told the second man to walk to the other tree and brace himself up against it, and in a short time, he, too, was tied fast.

Shasta had taken the precaution to turn their backs toward the point where Eagle-Eye, the Indian was concealed, and when he saw that they were both secure beyond the possibility of escape, he joined his Indian friend, and together they left the scene.

They followed the trail around the side of the hill for some distance, and then turned abruptly away from it and ascended higher by a rugged pathway.

A short walk then brought them to a point where the path descended into a kind of basin, if so it may be called, and there, seated before the door of a small tent, were Bill Tappan and Tom Pratt, the two hunters who played an active part in the opening chapters of my story.

Shasta was greeted with a hearty welcome.

"Wal, pard Wildman," said Bill, "what brings ye heur?"

Shasta told of his adventure, and his two friends listened with astonishment plainly written upon their faces.

"So they left ye while they went to fetch Captain Frisco, hey?" said Bill. "They expect to have a reg'lar circus with ye, I s'pose. Now, you jest say th' word, pard, an' we'll give 'em all th' circus they want, you bet! We'll jest more'n paralyze 'em. We kin git up thar behind th' rocks, an' then we kin clean out th' hull darned caboodle of 'em. *Cin't* we, Injun?" turning suddenly to the Indian.

Eagle-Eye nodded.

"We will all go back there and station ourselves behind the rocks," said Shasta, "and see what turns up. I want to keep an eye upon Captain Frisco this coming night, for I feel confident that he is up to some sort of mischief. If we come to blows with him and his men, however, I want you all to bear in mind that I do not wish him to be shot or captured. Spare him, and let him escape."

"Jest as you say," said Bill. "You're th' boss, pard, an' if you say don't shoot th' cuss, we won't."

"No, do not shoot him. I want to keep him for future use. Come on, now, and let's get back there."

The four started.

"By the way," said Shasta, as they walked along, "I suppose no one has come for the gold, to take it from where Captain Frisco put it, has there?"

"No," replied Bill, "no one has been after it yet. We've been keepin' close watch over it, th' Injun, Tom, an' me, accordin' to your orders, but no one has bothered with it."

"All right," said Shasta. "Do not relax your vigilance though, but keep your eyes upon the place day and night. Do not allow the gold to get away from there without your knowing where it is taken to."

When they came near the plateau they became silent, and approached the big boulder as noiselessly as shadows. Reaching it, they concealed themselves behind it and waited.

The sun sunk out of sight behind the hill-tops, night fell over the mountains and valleys, and still

they waited. The moon rose, and an hour later approaching footsteps were heard, and other actors appeared upon the scene.

They were eleven in all. Ten of them wore masks of black cloth, and the other was a prisoner, whose hands were tied behind his back.

As they approached the trees one of the masked men sprang suddenly forward, uttering an exclamation of great surprise.

"Thunder! boys, th' other feller is gone, an' heur's our pards tied up in his place!"

"What!" cried another, "you don't mean it!" and he, too, rushed forward to the spot.

"Yes, cap'n; heur we be, sure 'nuff!" said one of the men who were tied to the trees.

"And do you mean to say you allowed your prisoner to escape?" the leader cried.

"It wasn't no fault of ours, cap'n," the man replied. "He was tied fast as a rock, an' hearin' a noise over there we went to see what it was. We didn't have our backs turned hardly no time at all when we heard some one say 'Han's up!' or words to th' same effect, an' there stood th' pris'n'r, free, an' a-coverin' us with a pair of big pop-guns."

"How did he get free?"

"Somebody must 'a' cut th' cords."

"A pretty pair you are!" the leader cried. "For two cents I'd shoot you where you stand, or leave you there as you are, to starve! The idea! Two of you, both well-armed, and to let one man get away with you like that! You'd ought to be hung!" And Captain Frisco indulged in a hearty volley of oaths with every sentence he uttered, using language that his hearers could not fail to understand.

"Untie them," he ordered, at length, "and put this detective in their place. We're going to have a shooting-match here, boys, and the bull's-eye will be his heart."

The change was soon made, and then the leader said:

"Wilson Jaques, I am Captain Frisco, whom you have taken it upon yourself to hunt down. Not wishing to give you any trouble on my account, I thought I would come to you, and so shorten matters up. When you made your boast that you would capture me within a week, I think you reckoned without your host."

"Not a bit of it," the detective answered. "I reckoned in the whole family. But as I have only mentioned my intentions to one person, and that not many hours ago, it strikes me that Captain Frisco must be in communication with that person. How does it strike you?"

There was an awkward pause—a decided hitch in the proceedings, for a moment, and then Captain Frisco answered:

"Don't know anything about it. If you've got any prayers to mutter, you'd better beat it. You've got but two minutes more of life in you."

"One of you men—you, Dan, step out there with your rifle and get ready to shoot."

One of the masked men took up a position a few yards away from the prisoner, and cocked his rifle.

When the two minutes had about elapsed, Captain Frisco said:

"Jaques, my Christian friend, the time is up. Take aim at his heart, Dan, and fire!"

The man with the rifle raised the weapon, but ere he could bring it to a level he uttered a loud groan, threw up his arms, and fell to the ground with an Indian arrow quivering in his breast.

Exclamations of surprise were uttered on every hand, and the men all rushed forward to their fallen companion. They raised his head and poured some liquor between his lips, but in a few moments he was dead.

"Where did that arrow come from?" cried the leader, as he glanced around.

"Give it up, Cap," said Texas Joe. "But—Hollo! whar's the pris'n'r? Blame me if he ain't gone!"

"Gone?" cried Captain Frisco, as he sprang toward the tree where, but a moment before, the detective had stood. But he was no longer there.

The cords that had bound him lay at the foot of the tree, cut by the keen edge of a knife, but the man was nowhere to be seen.

"Quick! spread out and find him!" cried Frisco, as he drew a pistol and dashed toward the big boulder. He hurried around it, thinking his man might be there, but no sign of him was to be found.

For more than an hour the vain search was carried on, and then the outlaws were forced to give it up.

"Ye see, now, jest how it wur with us, cap'n," said one of the two men who had been left to guard Shasta Wildman, that afternoon. "Presto, change! Now ye've got him, an' now ye ain't!"

CHAPTER VII.

JOINING FORCES.

WHEN the outlaws rushed forward to the assistance of their fallen companion, Eagle-Eye darted out from behind the boulder, and with one swift slash of a knife cut the cords that held the detective prisoner. Then giving a hasty signal for the man to follow him, he retreated as quickly as he came.

The detective was right at his heels when he recognized his friends, and Shasta Wildman hurriedly whispered:

"Come with us. Eagle-Eye, lead us to the camp!"

They started away from the scene at once, hurrying along at a rapid pace and at the same time keeping the big boulder carefully between themselves and their foes as far as possible, and before the discovery was made that the detective was gone, they were out of sight. And then in a short time they were safe within the rocky basin where the two

hunters, as it is still convenient to call them, and the Indian had their tent.

"By George!" exclaimed Detective Jaques, as he shook himself together, so to speak, "that was a narrow squeeze! To whom do I owe my timely deliverance?"

"Most decidedly to Eagle-Eye, my Indian friend here, who rescued me from a similar predicament, in almost the same manner, only a few hours ago," Shasta replied.

"I'm mighty happy to make his acquaintance," the detective said, grasping the Indian by the hand. "It was very fortunate for me that you happened along, my noble red, and I won't forget the obligation I am under to you."

"By George! it *was* a close call for me, and no mistake!"

"Gentlemen, my name is Wilson Jaques, detective."

"And my name is Shasta Wildman," said Shasta. "My two friends here are William Tappan and Thomas Pratt."

The detective shook hands with them all.

"How came you to be in such a fix?" Shasta asked.

"Through my own carelessness," the detective answered. "I was seated in the bar-room of the Mountain Rest, smoking my after-supper cigar, when a man came in and asked if my name was Wilson Jaques."

"I acknowledged that to be my cognomen, and he said a man wanted to see me. I asked where, and he said he was waiting in the office of the Pearl mine."

"I am usually very cautious, but thinking that it must be Mr. Henry Calley, the only person I knew in the place, I followed the man without the least hesitation, and of course without any suspicion."

"He led me straight toward the Pearl office, where I saw a light in the window, but as we neared the building two men sprang upon me, pressing their pistols against my head, and there I was. We detectives are but mortal, despite all that you may read in story that would lead you almost to believe otherwise, and I succumbed to the inevitable."

"Those two men were joined by others immediately, but not a word was spoken by them till we reached the hill, and what was said then you no doubt heard."

The two hunters and the Indian were making active preparations the while to give the outlaws a warm reception, in case they should discover the retreat.

"Yes," said Shasta, "I heard the remarks, and from what you said I inferred that you have a strong suspicion as to who Captain Frisco is. Am I right?"

"You are. Although previous to the remark he made there and then, just before my own, I had no thought of the kind. But several little points flashed into my mind at once, and I think I can place my finger upon Captain Frisco at almost any time I choose to do so, provided my suspicion is correct. I must admit, however, that I am surprised. If he is the man, and were only a grain or two smarter, he could have carried on his double game almost without fear of detection. And now, from your remark, I take it that you know whom I suspect. Is that the case?"

"You suspect the right man," Shasta replied. "I know it."

"I thought I was right. But, even though I had no suspicion at all, the sign which they carry around with them is sufficient clew for me. I refer to the man with the cuts in his ears. By following him up carefully I can find out every man of the band."

"That man is Texas Joe," announced Shasta. "I ornamented his ears for him about a year ago."

"But that is always the case," the detective continued. "Outlaws will always overlook some point that is sure to lead to their detection. I have always found it so in my experience. This Captain Frisco is shrewd enough in some respects, but he neglects to look close enough after the small points."

Shasta told of his own adventure.

"I heard about your capture," the detective remarked. "Mr. Calley got up a party of men and sent them out to rescue you. Oh, he tries some very cute tricks, and no mistake. I would not be surprised if he offers a reward for the arrest of Captain Frisco, now that our capture and escapes will be the talk of the town, and his name will be drawn in."

"Having found your man," suggested Shasta, "I suppose you will soon claim the reward I offer."

"Yes," replied the detective, "and probably within a day or two at most. I must first bring it home to him so that I will have him dead to rights, you know."

"That is just what I am coming at," admitted Shasta. "I have been working this case up a little myself, and I offered the reward more to avert his attention from me than for any other purpose. Now, Mr. Jaques, if you will join in with me and work according to my plans, I will, when the work is done, give you *thirty* thousand dollars instead of twenty."

"I'm yours to command," assented Jaques.

"Very good. In the first place then, you must disguise yourself. He will have more fear of you than of any other man in the town. And you had better take up your head-quarters at Hardpan."

"Both good ideas," decided Jaques, "if you desire to continue working in secret against him."

"I do. This man has done me as great a wrong as it is possible for one man to do to another, and I want to bring him to account for it. Not only is he what you suspect him to be, but he is a *murderer*. Need I say more?"

"I have my plans all laid and unless some unforeseen event turns up, they are sure to work."

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Jaques, for your experience will be of great service to me. My plans are all laid out, as I said, and as for proof, I have all that will be necessary to bring his crimes home to him."

"He came to my office a few days ago and desired me to ship my bullion at the same time that he shipped his, so that by joining forces we might foil Captain Frisco if he should waylay the men and attempt to rob them."

"I agreed to do so, and sent three men to Hardpan to meet his men, giving them instructions to offer little or no assistance if they encountered the road-agents."

"The two parties met and set out together, but were soon hailed with the usual cry of 'hands up,' and were robbed and started back to Hardpan empty handed."

"Eagle-Eye," my Indian friend, was playing a part in the game, however, and he soon saw Captain Frisco drop the two packages of bullion in the road as he galloped along, and a man came out of the bushes by the side of the road and picked them up. Eagle-Eye followed the man and saw him conceal the packages in a hole in the face of the hill, opposite the trees where you were bound, after which he departed toward the town."

"Some time later Captain Frisco came and removed them to another hiding-place at some distance away from the first, and then he, too, descended to the town."

"That bullion is still there, and it is watched night and day by my men."

"Then you had some idea, when you joined forces with the other party, that things would turn out as they did, eh?" said Jaques.

"Exactly so," answered Shasta.

"And laid a trap for him accordingly, eh?"

"Yes; I baited a hook and threw it at him, and he swallowed it readily enough. I—"

"You put a private mark on each ingot of the bullion, I suppose?"

"That is just what I was about to say. And, if my plans do not miscarry, we will be able to arrest him when he comes for his plunder, when we will have everything ready for his reception."

"When will you give me my instructions as to the course you want me to take?" the detective asked.

"I will go with you to Hardpan to-night, as soon as the outlaws give up their search for you," Shasta answered; "and then I will tell you the whole story and give you all my plans. I have no doubt but you can give me some good advice that your experience will suggest, and perhaps I will then change some of my plans accordingly."

Calling the Indian, who was talking with the two hunters at a little distance away, Shasta bade him go and ascertain whether the trail was clear for him to depart.

In about half an hour Eagle-Eye returned and reported that the outlaws were gone, and then Shasta and the detective took the trail for Hardpan.

When they reached their destination they entered the Primrose saloon and engaged a room for the remainder of the night, and the next hour or two was spent in earnest conversation, Shasta taking the detective fully into his confidence.

Mr. Goose, the storekeeper, still flourished in Hardpan, and his first customers next morning were Shasta Wildman and Detective Jaques, who made certain purchases in the way of clothing, mining-tools, camp-utensils, etc., that quite surprised the worthy shopman.

Mr. Goose owned a mule, and they bought that, too. And then packing their other purchases upon its back, they turned their steps toward the Diamond mine.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY BARLOW.

WHEN Shasta Wildman returned to Three Sisters that afternoon, he was met at the Mountain Rest by Henry Calley, who was overjoyed at his safe return.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, "I can't begin to tell you how glad I am to see you back again, safe and sound! How did you manage to escape? I sent a party out to rescue you, but they returned without being able to accomplish anything. They did not even strike the right trail."

"I tell you what it is, sir, this sort of thing has got to be stopped! The idea, sir, of my being bound and gagged in my own office, and your being carried away by force from under the protection of my roof!"

"I tell you, sir, I won't stand it! Do you see that notice?"

Shasta glanced in the direction indicated, and saw a poster on the wall, which read:

"\$10,000 REWARD!

"The above named sum will be paid for the capture of

CAPTAIN FRISCO,

dead or alive.

"HENRY CALLEY,
Pres't Pearl Min. Co."

"So you are going for him, too, eh?" asked Shasta. "Yes, sir. And if ten thousand won't do it, I'll offer twenty!" And Calley's handsome face grew dark as he struck his fist into his palm to give force to his words.

"That detective whom you spoke to me about yesterday will no doubt give the matter his whole atten-

tion, with two such rewards in view," Shasta remarked, carelessly.

"Oh! by the way," returned Calley, instantly, "he's missing!"

"Missing?"

"Yes. He left the bar room of the Mountain Rest last night, in company with an unknown man and has not been seen since. I have been thinking perhaps he has found Captain Frisco sooner than he expected to find him, and in a manner not wholly to his liking. But of course that is only a guess."

"You may be right," Shasta replied, "but detectives, you know, are hard to kill. They have as many lives as a cat. I would sooner say that he is upon the trail of the outlaw at this moment, and warn Captain Frisco to be on his guard."

"I hope he is, sir. But you did not tell me how you made your escape. What sort of adventure did you have?"

Shasta told of his adventure with the outlaws exactly as it is known to the reader, with the exception that he would not disclose the name of the friend who had set him free.

Calley's face was a study.

"Well," said he, "here you are, and no damage done, so come and take a social drink with me."

"No," was the reply. "I thank you; I never drink."

The vilest hole in the town of Three Sisters, was the Black Hawk saloon.

It was the popular resort for the worst characters in the place, and no honest miner cared to enter its doors. Rumor said that more than one tenderfoot had found his way into the den, never to see the light of day again, and generally what Rumor says has some foundation, more or less, of truth.

The building was a low-roofed, one-room shanty, and was "run" by a big Irishman, who was known as McCune, the Bruiser. And a bruiser he was.

On the evening that followed the afternoon just mentioned above, there came a stranger to the door of the Black Hawk. And not only as far as the door did he come, but he boldly entered.

The new-comer was tall and slim, and ragged, and dirty. He looked as though he had not seen soap and water in six months. His face wore a hunted, half-starved expression, and his eyes roamed around the room in a restless manner, as though he feared to meet an enemy there.

Evidently reassured, however, after a hasty glance at the faces around him, he approached the bar and exclaimed:

"Oh! I'm Billy Barlow,
All ragged, you know,

and dirty, too; and so forth. But I kin kick higher, run faster, jump further, screech louder, and shoot quicker than any other galoot on th' hull Pacific slope! Set me out a drop of yer forty-rod p'izen, Mr. Barkeeper, an' see me git away with it. I'm a hoss, I am; a reg'lar two-forty, git-up-an'-git trotter!"

"Have yez got th' wherewith to pay fer a drink?" demanded McCune, as he hesitated about placing the bottle where the stranger could get hold of it.

"Have I got the necessary?" repeated Billy Barlow, as the man was pleased to call himself. "Why, I'm jest scratchy with it!" And going down into his clothes he brought out a handful of golden nuggets that fairly caused the Irishman's eyes to sparkle.

The stranger became an object of interest at once.

"Come up, boys," he called out; "every mother's son of ye, an' wet yer whistles. I'll stand treat all around."

"The boys," soon ranged themselves along the bar, and poured out their drinks, and then one and all raised their glasses.

"Pshh!" Billy Barlow spluttered, stepping short at the first taste, and spitting the stuff out; "ye gods and little fishes! What on earth is it? I've got a copper-lined stumjack, warranted to stand anything from benzine to oil vitriol, but I'll be hanged if it will hold this stuff! Whew! it beats anything I ever tackled in my life! Take it down, boys, if ye like it, but not any fur me!"

Quite a laugh ran round the room, at the stranger's expense.

"Oh! ye may smile," he exclaimed, as he wiped his mouth upon his sleeve. "but I can't see anything funny about it! I expected to git somethin' pretty lively, but no sich concentrated ightnin, as that!"

He paid for the treat, and then turned his attention to what was going on around him.

At one of the tables was a faro lay-out.

"Whoopee!" the stranger cried, as he skipped across the room and slapped a big nugget down upon the ace. "Come along, dealer, and gobble it up!"

Mr. Barlow was decidedly a lively character.

The dealer of the game seated himself at the table, and in a few minutes Billy Barlow's gold "went over to join the majority."

He staked again, but the result was the same as before, and in less than an hour he declared himself "busted."

"Jest my luck!" he cried. "I'm no sooner flush than I go an' buck th' tiger, an' th' tiger is 'most always sure to claw me all up, every time. It's my misfortune, paros, an' I can't help it. Now, heur I am, out of money an' out of work, an' my stumjack is as empty as a base-drum. Say, Mr. Dealer, give me a dollar to git me some grub, will ye?"

The dealer complied.

"Now, that's what I call real white!" Billy exclaimed. "Some men would 'a' bounced me right

out into th' road th' minute I lost my last shekel. You're th' true blood, pard, every time! Say," he added, as he stowed the dollar away, "do you know a galoot around heur called Texas Joe?"

"Yes, there he is, right over there by that poker-table," replied the faro-dealer, pointing him out.

Billy went over and slapped the man upon the back.

"My man," he exclaimed, "you're wanted!"

Texas Joe wheeled around, pale as a ghost.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Billy. "Did ye think yer time had come?"

"Who th' deuce be ye?" Joe asked.

"Wal, pard, at present I find it agrees with my health to call myself Billy Barlow. Do ye remember a cuss who helped you escape from a certain brown-stone mansion out in th' States, once upon a time?"

"You ain't my ol' pard, Billy Wago, be ye?" Joe cried.

"No, I ain't Billy, but Billy is a pard of mine, an' when I told him I was comin' up heur, he said he thought I'd find his old pard, Texas Joe, somewhere around heur, an' he told me to ask fir ye, an' mention his name. He's down in San Frisco. Say, kin I have a few minutes' private talk with ye?"

Texas Joe led the way out of the room.

"Say, Joe," said Billy, when they were alone, "can't ye put me onto a job?"

"Be ye true blue?" Joe asked.

"Did ye ever know Billy Wago to tie to a pard that wasn't?"

"No."

"Wal, Billy Wago an' me's tied together in a double bow-knot. Ye kin jist bet yer boots on me, every time!"

"I guess you're all right," admitted Joe, "an' I'll see what I kin do fer ye. Wait heur a minute."

Texas Joe entered the saloon again, and when he came out he was followed by several men.

"Pards," he said, when they came to where Billy Barlow was waiting, "this heur galoot wants a job. He's a friend of an old pard of mine, an' I guess he's all right. What d'ye think about takin' him in?"

"Ye see, gents," explained Billy, "I'm at present 'wanted' by th' officers of th' law, an' if I kin git a job up heur in th' hills, I'd like it. It's a good place to hide, ye know."

"That bein' th' case," spoke up one of th' men, "I think we might take him in. He could take Dan's place, Joe, ye know."

"That's so. We're one man short, an' I guess we kin do somethin' fer ye. Come along with us an' see th' boss, anyhow. An' it's 'bout time we were gettin' out there, too, boys."

Billy Barlow followed Texas Joe and the men, and when they entered a narrow canyon, about two miles out of the town, they stopped.

"Heur we be," announced Joe, "an' it's 'bout time fer th' boss to come."

A few minutes later a masked man joined the group.

"Number One," proceeding at once to call the roll.

"Here!" responded Texas Joe.

"Number Two!"

"Here!" answered another.

And so he went on, until all had answered save the stranger.

"He's a pard of a friend of mine," explained Texas Joe, "an' he wants to jine us. He's off-color with th' law, Cap, an' I guess you'll find him true blue. He's a leetle anxious to keep himself out of th' way at present."

"What's your name?" asked Captain Frisco, for it was he.

"My name is Billy Barlow," was the reply.

"Are you willing to take upon yourself the oath of allegiance to our band?"

"Yes, sir," answered Billy, "I'm willin' to take anything at all."

Captain Frisco then administered the oath, Billy repeating it after him, word for word. It was blood-curdling, but Billy made mental reservations as he went along, and enough of them, too, to knock the obligation into a cocked hat, so far as the peace and quietude of his conscience were concerned.

"No business on hand for to-night, boys," the leader announced, when he was through with his new recruit, "so you may return to town. But be here to-morrow night, at eight."

Captain Frisco then left them, and a few minutes later the men returned to the town.

When they reached the Black Hawk saloon, they entered, and once more Billy Barlow made his way to the faro-table.

"Oh! I'm Billy Barlow,
All ragged, you know,"

he sung, "but I've found another little nugget away down in my breechaloons pocket, an' heur it goes!" And he slapped it down upon the ace.

The dealer of the game slipped the cards, and presently the ace won for the player. Then Billy staked again, and again he won. And so the game continued, until at last the dealer declared that the bank was broken.

"Never mind, old hoss," encouraged Billy, "better luck next time. Never say die. I didn't squeal when th' bank busted me, an' th' bank ain't got no room to squeal now. Heur's th' dollar ye lent me, pard; much 'bliged." And he and his new companions left the room.

Once outside, Billy made a fair and equal division of his gains among his new friends, and they led him away with them to Captain Frisco's stronghold in the hills, each and every one of them swearing by

all the gods of war that he was the best fellow they had ever met. Billy's standing among them was assured.

The reader of course has guessed the truth that Billy Barlow was Wilson Jaques, the detective, in disguise.

CHAPTER IX.

RUN TO EARTH.

Two weeks passed quickly away, during which time the Pearl Mining Company made large and frequent shipments of bullion, not a single ounce of which reached market, however. Every possible precaution was taken, but Captain Frisco was sure to overcome every obstacle placed in his way, and was always successful in carrying off the gold, sending the expressmen back empty-handed.

The Diamond mine, on the other hand, lost nothing. Every shipment was made with the greatest secrecy, and not once was Captain Frisco encountered. No two shipments were made on a corresponding day or hour. In fact, whenever it was known, or even suspected, that the Pearl would make a shipment of its bullion on a certain day, the Diamond managed to do likewise; and of course as it was impossible for Captain Frisco to attend to both at once, one was certain to escape. It is not very difficult to understand which that one was likely to be.

About this time a meeting of the stockholders of the Pearl Mining Company was announced to take place at Three Sisters, and one evening an extra stage-coach brought them up.

At an appointed hour the next day they assembled in the company's office, and the meeting was opened, Henry Calley occupying the chair.

He was pale, and somewhat nervous, and the entrance of Shasta Wildman did not tend to calm him.

The business of the meeting progressed, reports were read and passed upon, and then came the business of electing officers for the ensuing year.

Henry Calley was mentioned for nomination at once.

Shasta Wildman rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think it would be well to nominate only a stockholder for the office of president of this company, and that Mr. Calley is not."

Had a thunderbolt crashed into the room, greater surprise could not have been shown. It was startling news to nearly all present. Great excitement prevailed, and during the next few minutes the meeting was in great disorder.

Several strangers entered about this time, and when the room became quiet again Paul Marvin moved the nomination of Shasta Wildman to the office of president and general manager of the company.

One of the strangers seconded the motion at once, and Calley put it before the meeting.

A heated debate instantly followed, but the vote was soon called for, and Shasta Wildman was elected, the strangers all voting for him. In short, he had "packed" the meeting. Not a very honorable proceeding, generally, but in this instance it can hardly be questioned. Furthermore, the strangers were genuine stockholders, Shasta having transferred to them each twenty shares of the stock.

As the result of the vote was announced, Wilson Jaques entered the room, and placing his hand upon Henry Calley's shoulder, said:

"Henry Calley, you are my prisoner!"

This was another bomb. The gentlemen from San Francisco were astounded.

Calley's hand flew to his hip pocket, but Jaques was too quick for him, and "covered" him in an instant.

"What do you arrest him for?" one man asked.

"I arrest him on the charge of being a highway robber," was the response. "Gentlemen, this man is Captain Frisco, the road-agent!"

This was the greatest surprise of all, and all order was completely lost.

The detective snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the wrists of his prisoner, and then it was that Calley found his tongue.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "This is an outrage, and I demand to know what proof you have that I am Captain Frisco!"

"The proof will be produced all in good time, my dear Calley," assured Jaques, "but for the present you must come with me."

"I won't go!" cried Calley. "There is a law in this land, gentlemen," he said, turning to his friends, "and unless this man has a warrant for my arrest I call upon you to protect me, and make him free my hands!"

"This is my warrant, sir," and Jaques tapped his revolver, "and unless you come with me peaceably it will be judge, jury and executioner as well. Gentlemen, I know my business, and I have proof positive that this man is Captain Frisco. I warn you not to attempt to interfere with me in taking him from the room."

And grasping Calley by the arm he led him away, his revolver thrust under his ear.

"As president of the company," said Shasta Wildman, "I now call this meeting again to order. You are no doubt greatly surprised at the wonderful disclosures just made, but I can assure you that there is no mistake in the matter. Your late president is as great a villain as ever trod the earth. This arrest was made under my directions, and to-night I will show you proof that you cannot doubt."

"We will now proceed to business."

Meanwhile detective Jaques had marched his prisoner to a small cabin that he had engaged for the purpose, and locked him up, leaving a man to guard him.

Calley had tried hard to buy his freedom, offering the detective a large sum of money if he would allow him a chance to escape, but Jaques would not be bought.

The day passed away and night settled down over the town.

In the Black Hawk saloon a crowd of men were in earnest conversation.

"I jest tell ye what it is, boys," remarked Billy Barlow, "our captain has got to be set free. But th' question that aggitates th' public mind is, how is it to be did? There's six men guardin' th' cabin, every one of 'em armed to th' teeth, an' they'd jest make it more than warm fer us if we should try fer to go fer th' place in force. I tell ye we've got to put on our thinkin'-caps an' git right down to solid work on this thing. It's a serious question!"

"I've been tryin' fer to think of some plan to help him out," confessed Texas Joe, "but it is a dark outlook fer him. If th' guard wasn't so strong we might go fer 'em, but as it is they'd beat us off in no time, havin' all th' advantage on their side."

"I'll tell ye what we *might* do, Texas Joe," suggested Rilly Barlow, "an' that is this: You go up there alone an' ask to see th' boss. There ain't much hope that th' guards will let ye in, but they might, an' if they do you kin jest swap clothes with th' cap'n an' let him come out, an' you stay thar. How does *that* strike ye? Once th' cap'n is out, it won't take him very long to fix up a plan to git you out ag'in."

"That looks purty fair," asserted Joe, "but I don't think they'd let me in. They might though, as you say, an' blame me if I don't think I'll try it."

"It's about our only hope to save th' captain," assured Billy, "an' I think th' sooner ye try it, th' better."

"But what sort of a yarn am I to give th' guards?"

"Anything you kin think of at all. One yarn is as good as another, if ye go at it right."

"All right. I'm off. You boys jest come along, an' keep back in th' dark to see how I make it work."

The guardsmen around the little cabin where Henry Calley was incarcerated were pacing steadily to and fro, when a man suddenly approached them and said:

"Who's th' captain of this heur guard?"

"I am," answered one of the men, as he stepped forward, "what d'ye want?"

"Kin I speak a few words to ye in private?"

"Sartinly ye kin," replied the man, advancing still further. "But, don't try on no foolishness," he added, "fer if ye do I'll drop ye as quick as a wink." And he held a revolver in his hand, ready for immediate action. "Now, what d'ye want to say?"

"I want to go into th' cabin an' see Mister Calley," declared Texas Joe, for he it was.

"Can't be did. Can't do it nohow!" And the guard turned away.

"Hol' on a minute, pard," Joe exclaimed, "till I tell ye what it is I want to see him fer!"

The man stopped.

"Ye see, pard," explained Joe, "I've been workin' fer this Calley some, an' I've never got a cent from him. I want to git in thar to see him about it, an' see if I can't git some ducats. Ye see they'll take him away to Frisco to-morrer, most likely, an' this is th' only chance I'll git at him. Now, can't ye let me in fer half an hour?"

"Is that all ye want to see him fer?"

"Yes, that's all."

"Sure ye ain't one of Captain Frisco's gang, eh?"

"Sartin! I was never so s'prised in my life as when I heard Mister Calley was arrested fer bein' Captain Frisco!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Every time!"

"Wal, pard, I'll let ye in there fur jist ten minutes, an' no longer. No foolin', now, fer if ye try on any funny games ye're a dead man fer sure."

"All right, pard; you jest knock on th' door when th' ten minutes is up, an' I'll come right out."

They advanced to the cabin door which the guardsman opened, and Texas Joe stepped inside.

He struck a match as the door closed behind him, and there on a low bench he beheld Calley, bound hand and foot, his handcuffs having been removed.

Joe extinguished the match, stepped to his side, and whispered:

"Be ye awake, cap'n?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Is that you, Joe?"

"You bet it are, an' I've come to let ye out. You jest change duds with me, an' when my time is up you go out in my place." And as he spoke Joe cut the bonds that held the man prisoner.

The exchange was soon made and Calley said:

"You're a trump, Joe, and I won't forget you in a hurry. Where are the boys?"

"They're outside there in the dark."

"I s'pose the secret is out now, and they know who Captain Frisco is?"

"Yes, an' I guess it didn't s'prise many of 'em much, either."

"What plan have you made for me to go by?"

"Wal, we've fixed it that if ye want th' boys to foller ye, ye're to turn to the left when ye first go out th' door, an' if ye *don't* want 'em, ye are to turn to th' *right*. We'll meet ye in the canyon at sunrise, if I git out of heur, an' if I don't git out th' rest of th' boys'll meet ye anyhow."

"I had to lie like sin to git in heur, cap'n. I told th' guards you owed me money, an' I wanted to see you an' git it. So you kin play accordin' to my lead when ye go out."

"I tell ye what it are, pard, that new man of ours, Billy Barlow, is a whole team. He's got more good sound sense than th' hull durn'd lot of th' gang put together, not meanin' you, of course."

"A moment later, the guard rapped at the door, and shouted:

"Come, old man, time's up."

"All right," answered Joe, "I'm-a-comin'," and as Joe spoke, Calley pulled the hat he had given him far down over his brow, and opened the door.

"Wal," said the captain of the guard, "did ye git ye'r money?"

"No, cuss th' luck! I didn't," Calley growled. And turning to the right he walked rapidly away in the darkness.

The guardsmen smiled in a knowing manner as he disappeared.

An hour later a masked man appeared upon the plateau, where stood the two sturdy pines.

He glanced cautiously around, and then advanced to the side of the hill, measured the distance from the line of the two trees, and then reaching up his hand he removed package after package of golden bullion from the crevice in the rocks.

When this was done he stooped to pack the treasure in a convenient form to carry it, and then it was that a dozen men stepped from behind the big boulder and confronted him with cocked revolvers.

"Captain Frisco, you are my prisoner!" cried Shasta Wildman. "You are caught in the act of removing your stolen gold, some of which bears my private mark, and belongs to the Diamond mine. Gentlemen, unmask him."

The mask was torn from the man's face, and Henry Calley, pale with mingled rage and shame, stood before Shasta Wildman and the other stockholders of the Pearl, his guilt clearly proven.

"So you escaped, did you?" said Detective Jaques, who at that moment appeared upon the scene.

"Well, I'll take you back again, my friend, and this time I guess I'll leave the bracelets on your wrists."

And handcuffing his man once more, he led him back to the town, the others following.

How was this to end?

CHAPTER X.

THE FATE OF CAPTAIN FRISCO'S BAND.

WILSON JAKES, the detective, took his prisoner straight back to the cabin whence he had escaped.

"See here!" he cried to the guardsmen in a tone of well-feigned anger, "why did you allow your prisoner to escape?"

"Why, boss," said the captain of the guard—he, too, playing well his part, "our prisoner *ain't* escaped. He's right heur in th' cabin, as snug as ye please!"

"He *has* escaped," said Jaques, "and here he is. By the merest chance in the world he was captured again."

The guardsman approached, glanced at Calley's face, and then exclaimed:

"Why, this heur is th' prisoner, sure 'nuff; but ye see he's dressed in another man's clothes! I see it all now, plain as day!"

"A cuss kem heur an' said he wanted to see Calley fer a minute, to git some money that he owed him; an' he seemed so honest about it, an' told sich a straight story that I let him go in. He was only in there for about ten minutes though, an' then I told him to come out, an' s'posed he did; but it must 'a' been this man dressed in t'other man's clothes."

"Of course it was," said the detective, "and I must say you're a smart man! I told you to allow no one to enter, and now I suppose there's an armed man in there for me to tackle. Here, see if you can hold this man for a moment, and I will go in and capture the other one!"

Two of the guardsmen took hold of Calley's arms, and Wilson Jaques opened the door of the cabin. But the moment he did so Texas Joe sprang upon him, a cocked revolver in his hand, and thrusting it in the detective's face he pulled the trigger. The weapon only clicked, however, and did not go off, it having been "doctored" by Billy Barlow, and the next instant the detective's arm shot out straight from the shoulder, causing Joe to turn a somers-et backward into the room.

Jaques followed him up instantly and snapped a pair of handcuffs upon him, and then called for the other prisoner to be brought in.

"This is much better luck than I expected," he said. "It's like killing two birds with one stone, you know. Here one of your men comes to let you out, captain, and puts himself in your place. You are captured again, most fortunately, and brought back, and now here you both are. I guess I'll take better care of you this time, too. I'll lock you both together. There, that's it; now I will bid you good-night." And the detective went out, locking the door behind him.

"Now, you men," he said in a loud voice, "see if you can manage to let him escape *this* time!" But even as he spoke he was shaking the captain of the guard warmly by the hand.

What possible object could he have in carrying the deception further? We shall see.

He remained in earnest conversation with the guardsmen for several minutes, and then turned away and disappeared in the darkness.

An hour or two went by, and then the six guardsmen began to show unmistakable signs that they were growing sleepy. One after another they dropped off, some leaning with their shoulders against the cabin, and others lying at full length upon the ground.

And then it was that the silent forms of Captain Frisco's band came creeping through the darkness, and stealthily approached them, weapons gleaming in their hands, and when the guardsmen awoke it was only to find themselves face to face with cocked and leveled revolvers.

"Not a word nor a sound!" was hissed into their ears. "Make a single move and you're dead men!"

Billy Barlow and another of the band quickly disarmed the guardsmen, flinging the arms in a heap upon the ground, as Billy directed, and then tied their hands and feet. When this was done Billy took the key from the captain's pocket and opened the door of the temporary jail.

"Hey, pard!" he said, "be ye heur?"

"Who are you?" asked Calley.

"Oh! I'm Billy Barlow, All ragged, you know,

but I'm jest th' sort of man to tie to, you bet! Come along, now, if ye ain't tied fast to the house. an' I'll git ye out of heur. I've got th' guardsmen all fixed, an' ye'll soon be as free as th' fresh mountain air."

"Can you take off these cursed handcuffs?" asked Calley.

"No," said Billy, "not now, but I'll file 'em off soon as we git up in th' canyon where we'll be safe. Come, now, pards, fer we don't want to fool around heur long, I kin tell ye!"

Calley and Texas Joe followed him from the cabin.

"Didn't I tell ye he wur a trump, cap'n?" Joe exclaimed. "Jest look heur how he's got th' guards tied up hand and foot, like so many turkeys all ready fer market!"

"You're a good man, Barlow, and no mistake," said Calley. "I won't soon forget you either. As soon as I am free we'll make it warm for this town, and let people know that Captain Frisco is not so easily run to earth."

"You jist bet we will!" cried Billy. "I'm with ye, every time!"

The men lifted the guardsmen up, one by one, carried them into the cabin, and then Billy Barlow locked the door upon them and the outlaws turned their steps toward their mountain rendezvous.

But ere they were half way there they ran suddenly afoul of half a score of armed men, who ordered them to raise their hands aloft "instantly," and they obeyed. Then one of these armed men took a key from his pocket and unlocked the handcuffs that bound Texas Joe and Henry Calley together, allowing the former to go still wearing the bracelets but taking the latter in charge. They then bade the others march on, and they obeyed this order also. The men being all masked, the outlaws were unable to recognize one of them.

How Billy Barlow did swear! After all the trouble they had gone to, he said to rescue their captain, to have him taken from them again like this! It was too much! And Texas Joe echoed his sentiments.

"Wal," said Billy, "we might as well go on an' git some sleep, pards. They'll start with him fer San Frisco to-morrer, an' we'll be on hand to meet th' stage-coach an' see what we kin do then. It's our only chance, now, an' I guess it will be our best holt." So he and the others went on to the mountain stronghold, where they were soon fast asleep. But when morning dawned they discovered that their leader *pro tempore* was not with them. They concluded, however, that he would soon return, and Texas Joe resolved to wait there for him.

Now, the town of Three Sisters, like most all other almost isolated towns of the far West, had its Vigilance Committee; and it did not take very long for a man of detective Jaques's caliber to find out who was the leader of that Committee.

He went to his cabin about an hour before daylight on the morning of which I now write, called him up, and said:

"How would you like to bag Captain Frisco and his band?"

"I thought Captain Frisco was a prisoner already," said the leader.

"So he was, but he escaped. Don't mention it yet though. How would you like to capture the whole band?"

Nothing in the world could possibly please the Committee more. Where were they?

"They are camping up here in the canyon," said Jaques. "There are nine or ten of them, at least, but if you take half a dozen good men you can capture them with ease. Their pistols are 'doctored,' every one of them. And, by the way, if you do get hold of Captain Frisco, you may claim the reward. I am done with the whole business."

When summoned together the Committee were jubilant. Ropes were quickly forthcoming, and in due time they set out for the canyon.

Proceeding with caution, and carefully following the instructions Jaques had given them, they soon came in sight of the outlaws where they were waiting for Billy Barlow to return, and then marching suddenly down upon them they demanded their surrender.

The outlaws laughed them to scorn.

"Come an' take us!" cried Texas Joe.

"Heur we come, then," yelled the Committee, and they made a charge.

An on-looker would most certainly have expected to behold a bloody fray. The charge was a most daring one, and it seemed as though the Vigilantes would be cut down before they could reach the outlaws, the position held by the latter being a strong one. But such was not to be the case.

For a moment the outlaws were too utterly surprised to act. The very daring of the charge astounded them. But the next moment their revolvers were leveled, and the triggers pulled. And then it was that their surprise changed to fear, for their weapons were useless. Billy Barlow had taken particular care to "fix" them thoroughly.

It was a bloodless victory for the Committee.

The ropes were then brought into use, and in a few minutes more the band of outlaws were hanging

from the limbs of a pine that was found near at hand. Such is Vigilante justice.

But in this instance the leader of the Committee was as great a rascal as any one of the men he had just hung, and that fact had not escaped the notice of detective Jaques. In fact, he had calculated to a nicety the part he desired the man to play in the carrying out of this well-laid game.

The moment Jaques had mentioned the reward he might claim in case he caught Captain Frisco, the man had begun to plan some scheme by which he might obtain the reward whether he found his man or not; and the moment he saw Texas Joe dressed in Henry Calley's clothes, an idea struck him.

Jaques had left the two men locked together in the cabin solely to prevent their rechanging their clothes, and to bring about precisely the results that followed. His was a long head.

The leader of the Vigilantes held a short consultation with his men, after which they cut Texas Joe's body down. And then—But pen of mine shall not portray the horrifying scene that followed. The reader will guess it ere this chapter closes.

The stockholders of the Pearl were up bright and early, anxious to make an early start and leave the dreadful mountain country behind them as soon as possible, and while they were seated at breakfast they were informed by detective Jaques that their prisoner had escaped.

"Escaped!" exclaimed Shasta Wildman, "when?"

"Yes," said Jaques, "he is gone. I went to the cabin a few minutes ago to see whether everything was straight, and could see nothing of the guardsmen. On opening the door, however, I found them lying upon the floor securely bound, and the prisoners nowhere to be seen. The guardsmen tell me they were surprised by a party of men, who got the drop on them and made them prisoners, and who carried the others away. They were no doubt Captain Frisco's own men. It was a neat piece of work, anyhow."

"Well, gentlemen," said Shasta, "this being the case, you will have to return without your prisoner, and no doubt he will trouble us again. What do you think about it, Jaques?"

"I think he will leave this part of the country as soon as possible," the detective replied, "and it is my opinion you will never see the rascal again. He is handcuffed, it is true; but he will no doubt soon manage to get them off."

"I am sorry, too, that he has escaped," said Shasta, "for he deserves to be punished. But fortune sometimes favors the evil-doer."

Quite a memorable breakfast was that. The stockholders had one and all taken strongly to Shasta Wildman, trusting him now implicitly, and an hour later when they were ready to take their departure for San Francisco, they shook his hand with the warmest expressions of friendship and good-will.

The extra stage-coach was about to start, when Wilson Jaques, who was to be one of its passengers, suddenly exclaimed:

"Let's wait a moment, gentlemen, and see what those men are carrying this way! Driver, hold up!"

Jaques's work was about done, and, having received the promised reward from Shasta Wildman, he was now starting for home. The driver was just starting his horses when the detective saw the Vigilance Committee approaching, bearing between them what appeared to be the body of a man, and he called the attention of the others to them as shown.

The men came near, and laid their blanket-covered burden upon the ground.

"Be you th' man that offered a reward for th' capture of Captain Frisco?" the leader asked, addressing Shasta Wildman.

"Yes," said Shasta, "I offered a reward for him."

(A look full of meaning—a signal that all had worked right—was flashed from Jaques to Shasta, who understood it instantly.)

"Then I claim th' reward, fer heur's yer man," and the leader of the Vigilantes touched with his foot the form beneath the blanket.

"But," said Shasta, "I offered the reward for Captain Frisco *alive*."

The leader's jaw dropped, and his companions looked completely disgusted.

"However," Shasta quickly added, "if this is the man, I will give you something for your trouble, though I am sorry you had to kill him in order to capture him."

The leader's face brightened.

"We *didn't* kill him," he said. "I'll tell ye how it wur. Me an' my pards heur went up th' canyon about daybreak, an' found him layin' at th' foot of a cliff. Ye see his hands is locked together, an' I s'pose he fell. An' in fallin' he loosened a big rock which fell right down onto him, mashin' his head all out of shape. I'll take off ther blanket, if ye say so."

He was told to remove it, and a sickening sight was revealed. The man's head was crushed so badly that the features were unrecognizable, but one of the ears was noticed particularly by Shasta Wildman, and also by Paul Marvin, who had just arrived upon the scene. There was a deep notch cut in its edge.

"Cover it again," said Shasta, almost instantly.

"I think this is indeed the man," said Jaques. "No doubt you all recognize the clothing, and if further proofs were necessary there are my handcuffs still on his wrists."

"Poor fellow!" the others echoed. "it is indeed he."

In the darkness of the previous night not one of the stockholders had noticed that Calley was not attired in his own clothes, and even had they done

so, and brought that argument to the front now, Jaques was ready to declare that he had allowed them to resume their own respective garments. Not easily caught was Jaques, and a falsehood more or less to a man of his calling, when in the way of "business," amounts to little.

"Gentlemen," said Shasta, "I will reward these honest men, give the body a decent burial, and hush up the sad affair as best I can. You on your part, I trust, in giving the news of Calley's death to the city papers, will refrain from publishing anything that will bring shame upon his friends. He has passed beyond your reach, so let his errors and your memory of them die with him. I trust you will only give the account of the sad accident that caused his death."

"We will," they answered, and once more shaking hands with Shasta they gave the signal to start, and the stage-coach rolled away.

Shasta then paid a thousand dollars each to the Vigilantes, on condition that they would give the dead body a decent burial, after which he and Paul Marvin walked over to the Pearl office.

"Well, Paul," said Shasta, "the end is at hand. How did you succeed with your part in Jaques's well-laid plans last night?"

"I carried out my part, as Jaques of course told you," Paul answered, "and Henry Calley is now a prisoner in the little tent with Bill Tappan, Tom Pratt, and the Indian all guarding him."

"And," said Shasta, "to the world *he is dead*."

CHAPTER XI.

CALLEY'S DOOM.

It will be remembered that mention was made at the close of a preceding chapter of certain purchases made by Shasta Wildman and Detective Jaques in the town of Hardpan, among which were articles of clothing, mining-tools, camp-utensils, etc., and also a mule; and it is now my purpose to show with what object in view those purchases were made.

In planning his revenge upon the men who had so deeply wronged him, Shasta Wildman determined to reproduce in tableau the frightful massacre with which my story opens, thus bringing the villain face to face with his crime, and at the same time so steel his own heart as to be able unhesitatingly to pass upon him the sentence of doom that he so richly deserved.

The articles bought of Mr. Goose, the storekeeper at Hardpan, therefore, were for the carrying out of this purpose.

It was night. Dark, lowering clouds hung over the scene, and over and anon vivid flashes of lightning, followed by deafening peals of thunder, seemed to rend asunder the very heavens. The storm-king was abroad in his might. It was a night calculated to turn the stoutest heart to fear, and teach poor mortal how weak and insignificant is his greatest power.

Beneath a tree, in a little valley among the hills, stood a man. Handcuffs were upon his wrists, and he was tied to the tree with stout cords.

That man was Henry Calley, his handsome face pale and haggard.

He had been brought there about an hour before sundown by Eagle-Eye, the Indian, and had stood there since that time. It was now near the hour of midnight. His soul was filled with terror as he stood alone near the scene of his crime, and great beads of cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

Presently an unearthly light illumined the scene, as colored fire was set off at different points by unseen hands, and then footsteps were heard approaching. Nearer and nearer they came to the prisoner beneath the tree, and a moment later he beheld a sight that fairly chilled the blood in his veins.

Four men appeared, one of them leading a mule, upon the back of which were packed mining-tools and camp-fixtures, which proved them to be a party of miners. But they had a most unearthly appearance, that showed them to be not of this world, but of the world of shadows. Men and beast appeared to be as white as snow, and in the glow of the colored fire the sight was one that no man would care to see a second time.

The man beneath the tree screamed aloud in mortal terror, and closed his eyes to shut the vision out; but in spite of his will they were open again instantly, and drawn toward the weird beings before him.

To him these death-like faces were as familiar as though he had seen them but yesterday, and he recognized them as James Raesoner, Mark, and John, and Ralph Rowland.

The men were plodding steadily along, but a moment later the sharp reports of rifles were heard, and they fell to the ground, writhing in the agonies of death.

Then four masked men rushed forward, bearing the smoking weapons in their hands, and were about to plunder their victims when one of them, Ralph Rowland, raised himself upon his elbow, fired upon them, and one of their number sunk down in his tracks. But before he could fire again the others sprung upon him and disarmed him.

"So," cried the leader, "we didn't fetch you at the first round, eh?"

But Ralph Rowland made no reply. He could only gaze upon the lifeless forms of his companions, and moan in anguish.

"Ralph Rowland," the leader hissed, "I am Henry Calley, who was your rival for the hand of pretty Mary Raesoner, five years ago. I swore then that I would kill you if you won her, and kill you I will. Then, with all your gold in my possession, I will re-

turn to Colchester, inform Mary of your death, and in due time court and marry her. Will not that be sweet revenge?"

Ralph Rowland reeled forward to grasp the villain by the throat.

"Ha! ha! ha! I see it tears your heart to think of it! But time is precious, so I will put an end to you at once." And as he spoke the masked murderer raised his revolver and fired a shot at the wounded man, dropping him at his feet.

By this time the colored fire was burning low, and a moment later all was dark again. And then it was that Henry Calley cried aloud in the terror of his soul, and prayed that he might die. But no relief came to him.

Five, ten, twenty minutes passed, and then several men approached, all bearing torches, and foremost among them was Shasta Wildman.

"Henry Calley," he said, as he and his men gathered around the tree, "do you know me?"

"Yes," the wretched man answered, "you are Shasta Wildman, the Gold King."

Instantly Shasta flung aside his hat and false beard, and cried:

"And do you know me now?"

"My God! it is Ralph Rowland!"

"Yes, Henry Calley, human fiend that you are, it is I! And I am tempted to drive a knife into your vile heart!"

"Be merciful, and kill me at once," Calley moaned. "No other mercy can I ask at your hands."

"And even that mercy I deny you. No! you shall live—live to suffer what you have caused me to suffer!"

"Your murder has just been reacted, to bring it to your mind in all its horror, and now, coward and murderer, the time for my revenge is come!"

"When I fell, with your bullet almost in my brain, Henry Calley, I was not dead as you supposed, but for seven long years I was a maniac. For seven years I lived in these hills and woods, as wild as the wildest beast that is in them now. For seven long years I was to the world dead!"

"For seven years I was cared for and fed by this Indian you see at my side, while you were enjoying my wealth, happy in the affections of the woman who believes herself to be your wife; while you were enjoying the wealth of those whom you murdered."

"Poor Mrs. Raesoner! Does not your very soul recoil in horror when you think how she fell dead at your feet? You, the false friend. You, the murderer!"

In the blind, uncontrollable passion of his heart, Ralph Rowland sprung upon the man and clutched his throat with both hands, but his friends quickly pulled him away. Ralph had foreseen that such an act on his part was likely to occur, and had given orders to his men accordingly.

"For seven years Henry Calley," he continued, "I dwelt in a cave in these mountains. For seven years I knew neither night from day nor day from night, and when at last my reason was restored to me the whole of the seven years was but a blank."

"First of all came the knowledge that for seven years I had been dead to the world. Then came the knowledge that you were enjoying my wealth. Then I learned from Paul Marvin that you had caused the death of Mrs. Raesoner, and had won Mary's hand in marriage."

"You never knew how near you were to death that night!"

"My first care was to take Mary from you, and to place her beyond your reach."

"Detective Jaques was right when he told you he had seen her in the Cane mansion, for there she is at this very moment."

"Step by step I have hunted you down, Henry Calley, planning my revenge while I worked, and now your doom is sealed. For the remainder of your life you are doomed to confinement in the cave where for seven years I lived, a band of irons around your body, and that band secured to the rocky wall of your prison by heavy chains."

"For God's sake, man, be merciful and kill me at once!"

"No! you shall die inch by inch! The seven years that are blotted from my life shall be returned to you with a double interest. Never again shall the light of the sun shine upon you. You are doomed to a living tomb."

"Your three companions in crime have all perished by my hand, and when I dispose of you your victims will have been avenged."

"The first to fall was the man I shot on the day of the massacre. The next to fall was James Week, or Red Jim, whom I killed at Hardpan a year ago, and whose dying confession I have in my pocket. The next, was Texas Joe, who, with the rest of your band, with the exception of Billy Barlow, was hung by the Vigilance Committee this morning."

"Billy Barlow was none other than Wilson Jaques, the detective."

"Untie him, men, and then you may depart. Myself and Eagle-Eye will finish this work. Take the mule and the trappings with you."

The order was obeyed, and the men departed, leaving Ralph and the Indian to dispose of the prisoner, and these two soon led him from the spot.

The gathering storm seemed ready to burst at any moment, as they hurried forward, their way now lit up with the glare of lightning, and now black in gloom.

In due time they came near the Diamond mine, but instead of going there for shelter they ascended the mountain until they arrived at the cave of which mention has several times been made, and there they forced their prisoner to enter.

A torch was lighted, and by it the interior of the cave was revealed.

At its furthest end were two strong chains, firmly

secured to the wall, at the end of which was a large iron band.

The torch was placed into a niche in the wall, and then Ralph Rowland and Eagle Eye forced their prisoner to the floor. The iron band was quickly locked around his waist, the handcuffs were removed, and then Ralph said:

"Murderer, this is your doom. So long as you live that band of iron shall never leave your body, nor the chains leave the wall where they are imbedded. You shall be provided with food and water, and in winter you shall not freeze; but here you shall end your days. Henry Calley, adieu! I never want to look upon your face again!"

And turning away, Ralph and the Indian left the cave.

"Have mercy, have mercy!" Calley screamed. "God in heaven, have mercy!"

At that moment a vivid tongue of flame shot down from the clouds, a terrific peal of thunder shook the mountain to its base, and then all was blinding darkness.

The mercy that had been denied Henry Calley by his fellow-man was shown him by his Maker, for that bolt of lightning rent asunder the rocky cave and ended his life, and great masses of rock buried his body forever from sight.

CHAPTER XII.

REUNITED.

THE reader's attention is again invited to the Cane mansion, the finest residence, at that time, in the city of San Francisco. I might say the finest in all California.

It was a lovely afternoon, but the sun was low in the west, almost ready to sink into the blue Pacific, and evening was coming on apace.

Mary Rowland, more beautiful than ever, if that were possible, was seated alone in her boudoir, attired in a handsome evening dress of pale-blue satin.

In her hand she held an open letter, old and worn with frequent handling, which she was reading over and over again.

"One month from the date of this I will be with you," she read. "Please to enter the parlor at seven o'clock in the evening, and be neither startled nor frightened at what you will see!"

"What can it mean, I wonder? I have waited patiently for this day to come, and now the hour is almost at hand."

"How nervous I am! I almost dread to keep the appointment! I fear that some evil news is coming to me, and yet the presentiments of my heart are less of evil than of joy."

"Be neither startled nor frightened at what you will see." What can it mean? But I will think of it no more. I have asked myself the same question a thousand times before, and—There! crushing the letter in her hand and throwing it upon the floor. "I dismiss it entirely! I will keep the appointment and learn what the mystery is."

An hour later she descended to the parlor. It was just seven o'clock, but the only person she saw on entering was John, the old butler, who was standing in the middle of the room, holding a newspaper in his hand.

"Mary, my child," he said, advancing toward her, but she drew herself up haughtily, and exclaimed:

"Sir, do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"On this occasion I must forget that I am your servant," he replied, "and I hope that you will allow my age to be my right, and permit me to address you as a fond father would address his child. Mary, Henry Calley is dead."

"Dead! My husband is dead, do you say?" she cried, sinking upon a chair.

"Henry Calley is dead," said the butler, solemnly. "Here is an item in yesterday's paper that will tell you all. The stockholders of the mine, who have just returned from a visit to the property, bring the report. It is true, beyond a doubt."

"Dead—dead—" the lady repeated, "my husband dead? I cannot realize it."

The aged butler touched a bell and ordered a glass of wine, which was soon brought, and the lady accepted it gratefully.

"Dead, my husband dead, and I supposed he would meet me at seven o'clock," she said, gazing sorrowfully at the floor. "My husband is dead!"

"Mary," said the butler, "are you prepared for a surprise—a great surprise?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking up quickly.

The butler removed a wig from his head and a false beard from his face.

"John Rowland!" cried the woman, springing to her feet in the greatest astonishment.

"Yes, it is I, Mary, my child. I, the father of your husband—the grandfather of your boy. Excuse me for a moment, I will return," and before she could speak he was gone from the room.

"My God!" she cried, in the greatest agitation, "what is the meaning of all this mystery?"

"Mary," said a once familiar voice, and with a scream she turned, to find herself face to face with Ralph Rowland.

He was dressed as nearly as possible as he was dressed on the day when he bade her farewell at the railroad station at Colchester, years before, and she recognized him instantly.

"Do not be frightened, Mary," he said, gently, for I am Ralph—your husband. I—" But he had to spring forward and catch her, for she fell in a faint.

John Rowland entered hastily, and together the two men restored her to consciousness.

"Ralph! Ralph!" she cried, "is it really you?"

"Yes, Mary, it is."

"But—I—they told me you were dead," the poor woman cried, "and I—I am the wife of another! Why did you not come to me? Where have you been during all these years?"

"No, Mary, you are not the wife of another now, for Henry Calley is dead."

"Yes, yes, I remember," pressing her hands to her head. "And my father—my brothers, what of them?"

"They are dead. They were killed, as you were told, and it was believed that I, too, was dead, but my life was spared."

"And why did you not come to me?" she sobbed.

"Mary, for seven long years I was a maniac, a wild man, running at large in the mountains."

"Oh! if I had but known that you lived!" she cried. "Had I—could I have known that you were not dead?"

John Rowland again retired, and the two were left alone.

"Mary," said Ralph, taking her hand in his, "are you glad to see me?"

"I am glad to see you, Ralph," she answered.

"But tell me—am I your wife now?" and she hung her head upon her breast, her fair face covered with blushes of shame. "Have I been—the—wife of Henry Calley?"

"Mary," Ralph replied, his voice trembling with emotion as he spoke, "in the sight of God you are my wife, and mine alone. But in the sight of man you are not. Whether the law would say you were the lawful wife of Henry Calley, I do not know, nor need you care. If you were not, the fault is not yours. But, now you are free to marry whom you will, so far as the law is concerned. Yet, in the eyes of God I am your husband. Will you marry me, and become mine once more in the eyes of man?"

"I will," she answered. "When I married Henry Calley I supposed you were dead. I never loved him as I loved you—as I love you now, but I honored and respected him, and— But you do not blame me?"

"No, Mary, I do not."

"Tell me of yourself," she said.

This was no easy task, for Ralph desired to keep from her the secret that Henry Calley, whom she had honored and respected as her husband, was a villain—a murderer. Her humiliation was great enough. He would shield her from that shame at any cost.

"You were told that I was killed by Indians, I believe?" he said.

"Yes."

"Well, from the time when I and your father and brothers were shot down I knew nothing until seven years later, when I was rescued by two hunters, and then my reason returned to me."

"The two hunters took me with them to their cabin, in a little mining-town, and there I saw Henry Calley and Paul Marvin, but Calley did not see me."

"I made myself known to Paul, and from him I learned all. No one can imagine what I suffered. You the wife of another! It almost drove me mad."

"Paul joined me, and we planned to take you from the man who was not your husband—not yours in the sight of God—at least, and we did. There is no need to go over that ground, for you can now understand all that was mysterious then."

"How to end it I hardly knew; but at last I resolved to see you, and sent you word to meet me this night, when I would have left it to yourself to choose between us."

"Paul had told me that he considered your love for me was not dead, and on that I based all my hopes. It was he that wrote the letter to you."

"But, now that Henry Calley is no more, the barrier is removed."

"And your father. How came he here in disguise?" Mary asked.

"Who in all the world could I find more worthy to guard over you than he?" Ralph answered.

"True."

"I knew his voice, but I could not remember where I had heard it."

For two hours or more husband and wife were alone together, and the time that had elapsed since they had seen each other was carefully recalled.

"And my boy—your—our child," Mary said at length, "will you see him?"

"No, not to-night," said Ralph. "I long to see him, but you must prepare him to meet me. He must know that I am his father. I must have his love as well as yours."

"And you are going now?"

"Yes, I will go now, but I shall see you soon again. I will do what can be done to make you the lawful widow of Henry Calley, and then you shall once more be mine, and mine alone and forever."

And thus, for the time being, they parted, and Mary Rowland fell upon her knees in silent prayer.

In this world, it has been said, money will do anything, and three months later Mary Calley (?) held in her possession a decree of divorce from Ralph Rowland, dated prior to her marriage to Henry Calley.

Innocent as she was of all wrong in the eyes of Him who is just to all, she was now armed with a weapon that would defend her against the slanderous tongues of all idle gossipers.

It was a Sabbath morning.

The bells of the town of Colchester were ringing out in joyous peals, although the sky was black with the clouds of a springtime thunder-storm.

But at ten o'clock the rain ceased falling, and a few minutes later a wedding-party alighted at the neat, white church of which mention has been made before.

They entered, and the ceremony began. And as it progressed the sun broke through the clouds, shining in at an open window and throwing a rich halo of light upon the happy couple.

When the pastor at length closed his book, he said:

"And now, Ralph Rowland and Mary Calley, I pronounce you man and wife."

The joyous songs of birds were heard, and it was noticed that the shattered oak by the door of the church was returning to life, putting forth its leaves for the first time since the lightning had blasted it.

The story is told.

Ralph resumed his own name, and was soon as favorably known as had been Shasta Wildman. He retired from active business, and took up his home at Colchester, with his beautiful wife and loving son. Eagle-Eye, the Indian is with him, and he and Ralph Jr. became firm friends.

John Rowland is still living, happy in the love of his children and his grandchildren.

Paul Marvin married a beautiful girl in his native town, and lives near Ralph.

True to his word, Ralph divided his share of the Pearl mine equally between his two friends, William Tappan and Thomas Pratt, who are both rich men.

The town of Hardpan lost ground rapidly, and her citizens nearly all moved over to the town of Three Sisters, and thus the two towns became one, which, under another name, is now one of the most thriving places in Northern California.

Detective Jaques has long since retired from business, thanks to his liberal patron, Shasta Wildman, the Gold King.

THE END.

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